

THE IMPERFECT ANGEL,

AND OTHER SERMONS.

BY

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AND OTHER SERMONS.

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I.

THE IMPERFECT ANGEL.

"His angels He charged with folly."—*Job* iv. 18.

"The heavens are not clean in His sight."—*Job* xv. 15.

"A bruised reed shall He not break."—*Isa.* xlii. 3.

"Whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward."—*Matt.* x. 42.

I WISH to speak about God's purity. That purity is incomparable in its perfection, overwhelming in its intense splendour, and appalling, not only to human, but also to angelic thought, in its searching severity. And at the same time I want to put the truth of God's purity in its right relation to His patience and long-suffering and gentleness. It might depress and discourage us to look at one side of the subject without at the same time looking at the other. Side by side with the texts setting forth God's unapproachable purity, I have therefore placed texts which set forth the patience and the beneficence of His character, and the scrupulous and delicate equities of His administration.

In the addresses of Eliphaz the Temanite, God's strict and unapproachable purity is depicted in exalted and impressive phraseology. I do not know however that I could rest the whole weight of what I have to say upon the address of Eliphaz alone, because I am not quite sure how much in these addresses we are to account inspired. And here, in passing, I would warn against the not uncommon practice of picking out isolated words or sentences or paragraphs from the Bible, and looking upon these fragments of speech as inspired apart from the great whole. You have some of the devil's counsels put on record in these sacred writings; such as, "Fall down and worship me"; and, "Command that these stones be made bread"; and, speaking by the mouth of Simon, "Be it far from Thee, Lord." You are in no danger

of looking upon these counsels as inspired because the refutation follows in the very next sentence. But views are sometimes expressed—in the speeches of Job's friends for instance—that are not finally refuted till after the lapse of fifteen or twenty chapters. Unless you take large and comprehensive views of the drift of the sacred books, and see how part fits into part, you will very soon find yourself in serious difficulties upon the subject of inspiration. This seer Eliphaz sinned through overweening confidence in his own prophetic gift, and Job had to pray on his behalf before his error could be cleansed, and the sure favour of the Most High could be restored to him.

Not long since I stood before one of the noblest Gothic fabrics in Europe. Perhaps the characteristic of the building that most pleased and impressed me was the wonderful and unerring harmony of the dense maze of lines that ran side by side with each other in the spires, façades and elaborate doorways. Stand a little distance off, and every line seems as perfect as though it had been described with the most exquisite mathematical instruments. From foundation to highest coping-stone, there is not an inch of harsh, crooked, erroneous workmanship. But go close up to the cathedral, bring your eye alongside the well-hewn stones. After the chisel has done its best, the surface is very broken. You can pick out many a little inequality with the naked eye. Put the stone under a magnifying glass, and scores of excrescences can be counted in a square inch. But did it not seem just now that every line was perfect and unbroken, and as sharply true as a sunbeam? Yes, that is the impression you receive when you take up a position at the proper standpoint for contemplating the structure, and see the stones in their correct relation to each other. The builder did not build for the microscopist. You must take the wider view, and see the relation of part to part, if you are to realize what divine music in stone the fabric is.

And is it not thus with the inspiration of the Bible? If you tear word from word, and sentence from sentence, and paragraph from paragraph, and forget the relation of the separate parts to the whole, you will soon find your doctrine of inspiration a tissue of incongruities. You must take that wider view which will harmonize the whole into faultless truth and beauty.

You come to the study of the Book of Job. As a whole, it is easy to accept it as a faultless inspiration. Take out the speeches of any of these three friends, and you do not then get the product of an infallible inspiration. You have much noble truth, much

beautiful and sacred poetry, and much blundering assertion that needs to be corrected and modified by God's own summing up of the controversy, at the end of the providential visitation. The nine or ten speeches of these friends were crowded with as many mistakes as the rough draft of a child's first letter. Eliphaz the Temanite, who spoke with such sublimity of idea and such stateliness of diction, erred just as much as the rest of them. His error consisted, however, in the misapplication of truths that were obviously inspired, rather than in the premises he laid down as the basis of his appeal to Job. He was right in his abstract principles. We may accept, without scruple, the truth heard in this vision of the spirit-world about the inconceivable purity of God. The truth is amply sustained by other portions of the Bible. The seraphim veil their faces with their wings. In that attitude they bear witness to the truth, that in the unapproachable light of God's presence, the highest angels are frail and foolish, and marred with imperfection. The Son, who was in the bosom of the Father, declares that "none is good save one, that is God."

I. God's ideals of purity are so transcendent and so terrible, that the purity of the angel nearest to His throne is a little better than stain, shadow, darkness, in comparison. "His angels he chargeth with folly."

The very mention of an angel may touch a spring of scepticism in some of our minds, and predispose us to resent the view here taught by Eliphaz as an extravagance resting upon the flimsy basis of a speculation. We may be tempted to set little store by this lesson of a night vision that visited the hysterical spiritualist of Mount Seir, who made such grave mistakes in his noonday logic. Is not the whole subject, with the angel in the background, vague, misty, fanciful? Well, I rather wonder at the indisposition to believe in celestial intelligences, when our astronomers invent them for us by the thousand. It is true they do not take the responsibility of fitting them with wings, as did the Bible prophets, nor do they determine the exact tinge of the complexion, as did the mediæval painters, but they assume, and assume rightly, that man is not the only intelligent and observing being in the universe of God. Not very long ago a popular and accomplished astronomer assumed in the pages of the magazine he edits, that mathematical and inquiring and knowledge-loving creatures like ourselves exist in the planet Mars. He further intimated his conviction that these beings, as the result of careful observation and reasoning, have come to a great deal more knowledge about the arctic and

antarctic regions of our globe than we ourselves possess. They have probably long since settled the moot question whether there are open seas around the north and south poles. There are not a few people who will swallow the astronomical angels of Mr. Richard Procter with undisguised satisfaction, but who will wish to strain out from their well-filtered creed the angels of Eliphaz and Ezekiel and Zechariah and John. They are perfectly willing to believe in the celestial intelligences in Mars and the other planets, who watch our globe from afar in the interests of scientific theory, but not in the angels who stand about the Creator's throne, and who have been interested for untold epochs in the same moral problems as ourselves, and who have passed nearer to the centre of those problems. It is surely not unscientific to assume the existence of the pure and mighty beings spoken of by seers and prophets of olden time, nor speculative to ponder well the words which declare, that in comparison with God Himself the angels have about them traces of finite dimness, blemish, imperfection.

When the photographer wishes to take an impressive picture of some vast ruin or towering column or massive group of statuary, he not unfrequently places a human figure at the base to suggest the true magnitude by a comparison. Without some known standard of measurement for the eye, we should have very little perception of the true proportion of the object brought within our view. And so the Spirit of inspiration, in seeking to convey to us some faint hint of the strict and awful and absolute holiness of God, depicts ranks of angels indefinitely higher and better than the choicest saints of earth, about the throne of God ; and then tells us that these angels, who seem so lofty and stainless and resplendent, are creatures of unwisdom and shortcoming in comparison with the ineffable wisdom and surpassing holiness of God.

What ! Are the angels then frail and foolish and defective ? Have we not been accustomed to think of them as the types of all that is sweet and loyal and perfect, beyond the ideals of earth ? When the mother wishes to set forth the charm she sees in the quick, smiling obedience of her little one, this is the crowning epithet in her vocabulary. When the sufferer wishes to express his sense of the unselfishness of some lady, who leaves behind her the glitter of rank to smooth the pillow of anguish, he speaks of her as an angel of mercy. When a rare love has watched over a man's life with untroubled serenity and unwavering faithfulness for years, the man can only describe it as the love of a guardian angel. Are the angels indeed disfigured with limitation even as

we? Does not Jesus Christ Himself speak of them as the "holy angels"? Can it be that His Father thinks of them in a different aspect? Well, put them into comparison with poor, fallen man, and they will well justify the title "holy." Bring them into comparison with God, and the title will seem incongruous, arrogant, and misplaced.

The fall of some of their number shows that as a class *the angels have not yet passed beyond the stage of defectibility*. They have not risen into a wisdom so complete that no illusion can betray it, nor into a strength so unassailable that no temptation can score its record of disfigurement upon their lives. The fall of one great spirit from his first estate proves the possible corruptibility of the rest. They are free, it is true, from actual transgression, but they are passing through the first crude stages of a development in which, because of inward weakness and limitation, there is perilous room for the wiles of the tempter. They have not reached the transcendent holiness of God, who "cannot be tempted with evil."

A traveller crosses a continent, and in the temperate zones of the continent he finds a plant that sheds all its leaves in the winter and degenerates into a mere skeleton. He passes to the sub-tropical regions of the continent, and finds that same type of plant shedding only its weaker leaves in the winter time when the tempered cold breathes upon it. He passes on into the latitude of perpetual summer. This species of plant has now become an evergreen. But he knows that it is not an evergreen by its own tenacious strength and indestructible vitality, like the fir, or the yew, or the cedar. The handfuls of shed leaves that lie around it in the sub-tropical region remind him that it belongs to a type with innate defect and weakness. It would fade again if transplanted to the snow. And so God looks upon humanity. Its fall is universal. He looks upon the holy ones about His throne. He sees gaps in their glittering ranks. These mighty ones who minister before the throne and make the melody of the temple have revolted fellows. They belong to a defectible kindred. Perhaps these un-fallen ones owe much of their freedom from evil to the shelter of the calm heavens through which they move. God dare not subject them to the same terrible temptations that shall one day be suffered to confront the Son, and that shall leave Him unhurt. God looks upon His own nature in the Son. There is no defectibility there. Should that nature pass through all the risks of an incarnation, it will come back to the Father's bosom as spotless as when

it left it. An incarnation with its perils and possibilities would be fatal to an angel. The angel belongs to a family some members of which have faded out of their first purity, and have dropped into moral darkness and decay. Fallen and unfallen were made out of the same lump; they are offspring from the same stock. God can never forget how much of their loyalty they owe to the shelter of His presence. Out of these lustrous heavens the defilements of the first terrible revolt from right issued, and God can scarcely do other than look upon the heavens as unclean in His sight. The rebel angels once stood side by side with the morning stars, and sang as noble anthems as they. The nature which has been dragged down into envy and ingratitude and treacherous war is still represented in the thrones and dominions and principalities and powers that encircle the supreme throne. God can never forget the frailty, weakness, limitation that may be latent in the unfallen types of angelic life. "His angels He chargeth with folly." Their devotion to right is far from being as steadfast and complete and immovable as His own. "Let not Gabriel forget that his wisdom is finite. Let Raphael and Uriel and the angels that stand by the altar, and the seraphs that cry one to another, remember that they are the types of a purity that admits of soil and stain. Let them aspire into higher and yet higher circles of life and knowledge and adoration; or, if to-morrow be only as to-day, their very righteousness may become transgression no less than the righteousness of their exiled fellows." "He putteth no trust in His saints," and the seraphs, humbled by the silent rebuke of His more perfect holiness, "hide their faces with their wings."

And then the holiness of the angel will appear as little better than a frailty if we think of it *in comparison with the uncreated holiness of God*. The Divine holiness has in it a transcendent originality, with which that of the creature can never hope to vie. The holiness of the angel is but a feeble response to a vocation received from another. It is a mere echo. It reflects in some dim and struggling fashion the holiness of the Eternal. The angels are but copyists, and their workmanship is unutterably inferior to the original conception. They are like the cords in the lyre that begin to throb when corresponding chords are struck elsewhere. God's holiness is both original and originative. When there was no living creation to play upon His heart, He was just as rich in love, purity, righteousness, and all high moral attributes, as He is to-day. His character is the masterpiece that shall yet move uni-

versal imitation. In His care for the moral perfection of the universe, He cannot suffer a lower ideal than Himself to fill the heart of any of His reasoning creatures. Talk about the worship of the holy angels! Talk about prayer to the ministering spirits who hang unseen about our pathways, and uphold our footsteps, and keep gentle vigil over our slumbers! God's own hand breaks up the image. He Himself becomes the disenchanter. That goodness, however superior to our own, is finite at its loftiest altitude. To God's closest scrutiny, it is coarse with unchastened imperfections. The spirit of uncreated righteousness must be jarred by signs of feebleness and defect in the loftiest types of created righteousness. "He chargeth His angels with folly." At best they are inadequate messengers of the holy will of another. They mirror His purposes, and the reflecting surface is not bright as the sunbeam or expansive as the heaven God fills. Their excellence is derivative. It lacks the splendour of spontaneity. It is not given to them to have life in themselves, as it is given to the Son to have life in Himself. But it may be said, "This is a necessary condition of their finite natures, and will scarcely justify the strange charge of folly and imperfection." I am not quite sure that the limitation is altogether necessary. God may possibly permit holiness to become creative by its own uttermost intensities of power. If the angels had fitted themselves to become regenerative centres to the universe, I am not sure that their existence and movement would be so scrupulously screened from view. The creative element in Father, Son, and Holy Spirit may connect itself just as closely with the high moral passion of the Divine life as with its essential eternity.

In the judgment of the Most High, the holiness of the angel verges upon a frailty because of *its inferior vitality* and its less consuming fervour. The bright heralds of heaven have visited this world of shadow from age to age, and perhaps they have not entered very much more deeply into its tragedies than happy and light-hearted children enter into some of the tragedies of death with which they have been brought into contact. They have been messengers of God's holy wrath, but we do not read that in these scenes of judgment they were filled with pulses of unresting compassion that all but identified them with their victims. We do not read that they ever bled in the secret place of the spirit for Egypt's smitten and wailing mothers. When the angel of the Lord appeared over the plague-stricken Jerusalem, and the sword was uplifted against its children, we do not read that the angel would

fain have received the sword into his own soul. No angel knows what it is to love with a mighty intenseness that makes the love necessarily vicarious, and the heart break with pure grief over the sin and grief and shame of others. Their service is service rendered in balmy climes and amidst speckless sunshine. Their missions take them by rainbow paths and into firmaments filled with the breath of eternal spring. The orbits through which they glide on noiseless pinions are smooth and thornless. The ladders by which they ascend and descend between the presence of God and the creation to which they minister are twined with flowers and crossed with steps of gold. No Bethlehems, or Gethsemanes, or Golgothas have ever immortalized angelic devotion and love. Their love, however crystal pure, is a love to which sacrifice is strange. It does not draw them into incarnations and propitiatory offerings and down into the shadows of vast redeeming shames and agonies.

An unseen sword has pierced through the soul of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, no less than through the soul of the virgin mother herself, as she stood by the cross of the Son. If Jesus Christ is the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, the Father must have been touched in some sense from everlasting with the same sorrow. I do not wish to present this thought in an extravagant and ill-balanced fashion. If through the Father's foreknowledge, the sacrifice of the Son was an eternal sacrifice, that same foreknowledge made the triumph an eternal triumph.

But let us remember also, that the gift of the Son was from everlasting to everlasting. It only came within the conditions and limitations of time that our hearts might be able to feel the spell of its pathos and appeal. Within the dazzling clouds in which God veiled Himself there were abysses of vicarious love into which the angels could not look, holy places in the heavens into which Gabriel was unfit to pass. The desire of the heavenly hosts to look into these things, and their failure to fathom them, shows that redeeming love was beyond the range of their ideal life and obligation. Before all worlds there was dim mystery of self-sacrificing pain in the heart of God. The mark of the cross was imprinted in that bosom, on whose most intimate love the Son only was suffered to lean. There has ever been an element of sacrifice in the Father's grace and compassion. Whilst the love of the angels was gliding along pathways of summer sunshine and blessedness, His love was walking the pathway of thorns, and bearing the burdens of others, before all time. Do you wonder that the all-sacrificing God should

call the love to which sacrifice is strange and incomprehensible, a love of defect and blemish and limitation in comparison with His own?

The defect of the angel is a defect of *narrowness*. In comparison with the catholic and all-comprehending love of God, his love is insular and restrained. All perfect moral qualities are boundless. We call the love clannish, and imply reproach in the term, that shuts itself up to one family, or to one group of families only. We call zeal for the interests of one class, caste-prejudice. We call a man a patriot who is devoted to the welfare of his own race, and we call a man a philanthropist who is devoted to the welfare of man as man without distinction of race, and philanthropy is confessedly nobler than mere patriotism. There can be no perfection in the love that does not look out towards the larger humanity. Benevolence and righteousness win our praise, in proportion to the circles through which they extend themselves. Think of the boundless fields through which God's attributes work. Angels minister to individuals. An unseen army hovered near Dothan to protect a solitary prophet from his enemies. They came in their hosts to attend Elijah and Lazarus to their new scenes of life. God ministers to worlds from His richer fulness, as they from their poorer moral resources to individuals. Can you imagine the little film of mist, that has replenished the sap of some scorched blade of grass, vaunting itself against the river, that nurtures in its thousand miles of travel crops by which swarming empires are kept alive? Can you think of the glow-worm that lights up with its timid spark of phosphorescence a daisy root or half a dozen sprays of moss, measuring itself against the sun, that puts the splendour upon every bloom of earth, and lights the widest circumference of the solar system? Can you imagine the firefly, that glitters through a few square inches of the tropic night, matching itself against the source of primeval light that has nourished Sirius, and Orion, and Arcturus, and our sun, and of which the constellations of suns may be but tiny rills and pools. The moral activities of the angels are shut up within very small and shallow channels in comparison with the boundless activities of God's high moral attributes. Clusters of angels may come in their sympathy and help to the pillow of the solitary pilgrim on the highlands of Bethel, and this proof of their gentleness touches us deeply. But mighty worlds, with their untold millions of sentient beings, lean themselves upon the love and care and faithfulness of the great God who is above the ladder. The graces of these celestial envoys are dwarfed into frailty and

insignificance, when brought into contrast with the perfect moral life of God.

And then the holiness of the angel has about it the defect and limitation inseparable from *the briefness of its own history*. It is a frail thing of yesterday in comparison with the holiness of God. Think of the amazing epochs through which God's holiness has been unfolding itself. The worth of a moral quality is proportioned to the period through which it has verified and established itself. Hoary hairs add their own distinctive glory to righteousness. The virtues of the angels are lustrous beyond earthly dreams, but they are the virtues of neophytes. The heart of a true Christian is always drawn out to a young convert ; but however single-minded and fervent and trustful that convert may be, he cannot command the homage we accord to the pure and long-tried saint. In comparison with the Ancient of days the angels are but like converts of yesterday. Their life is of recent birth, and seems to link itself in God's sight with the most fragile and ephemeral things. Their love is but of a few fleeting centuries. He is from everlasting to everlasting. Some one has made the calculation that a flash of lightning occupies but the millionth part of a second of time. Long as these epochs may seem in our reckoning, through which the angels have been shining in their purity and spiritual loveliness, their holiness is but like a lightning's flash in the long, eternal day of God's moral splendour. Angelic purity is a gleam that can only be measured in His sight by the infinitesimal fractions of a second. Is it any wonder that in such a presence the angel of most surpassing achievement should veil his face ?

And again, the holiness of the angel has about it *the defect of immaturity*. The holiness represented by unfallen spirits is probably very imperfect in comparison with that fuller and more exalted ideal into which they shall one day rise. Whilst no Scripture justifies us in thinking that the angels have been redeemed out of sin, there can be very little doubt that they are growing up out of a less into a more exquisite completeness. May not evolution be the one unfailing and all-inclusive law of the universe ? God seems to create nothing perfect at the outset of its destiny. He puts the seed of a possible perfection within, and leaves it to rise by the path of an unresting movement into ever-expanding breadth and sublimity of life.

“ From lower to higher, from simple to complete,

This is the pathway of the eternal feet.

From earth to lichen, herb to flowering tree,

From cell to creeping worm, from man .o what shall be.”

The insight and holiness of the angel are but starting-points for some higher and more magnificent evolution of character, the first cell out of which shall issue the wonder and transfiguration of their after destiny. Whilst it is implied that the angels who stand in God's presence have kept their first estate, it is nowhere implied that that first estate is the final goal of their vocation. We are rather left to infer that they are passing through stages of comparative imperfection to nobler ranges of spiritual attainment and service. They are under education, and are still in their babyhood. Their songs of transporting melody are but the first lisplings of conscious life. Their wonderful flights of holy service are but the first gropings of child-like weakness. In comparison with the ever-growing circles of sanctification through which they will be raised, and the capacity for which already exists within them, their present attainments are little short of impotence and frailty. The history of human redemption is yet to reflect its inspiring lessons in their experience and life. It is not an idle and unfruitful instinct that quickens their ambition to look into its mysteries. Think you they can open that book and master its Divine elements without reaching some new sublimation of character and receiving some new girding for a more exalted heroism of service? God sees that they are immeasurably below the levels to which they will climb in the epochs of promise that are before them. They, no less than the children of men, look on to a golden age. They have not yet apprehended all that for which God made them. The angel must needs forget the things that are behind, for God has planned him for more brilliant and sunward flights. "His angels He chargeth with folly."

But all this may sound harsh and discouraging to us. If God sees defect in the angel, does He not pronounce upon us a judgment of crushing severity? Does not the theology of Eliphaz paint God with features of arrogance and unreason and intolerance in His character? Let us qualify this view by another, and see if the two will harmonize with each other.

II. Consider the unparalleled patience and gentleness of God.

"His angels He chargeth with folly." Yes; but He keeps them at His feet, and with exhaustless grace carries on their education, epoch after epoch. He has yet graver impeachments to direct against the children of men, but He bears with them from generation to generation, and His Spirit never ceases to strive and instruct and allure, so that they may come at last into conformity to His holy design. His all-watching love cherishes the lowliest

forms and the crudest beginnings of goodness. By a patient and condescending nurture that seems out of all proportion to the end contemplated, He lifts the bruised reed into robustness and vitality again. He breathes tenderly upon the smoking flax, and out of the most unpromising and repugnant conditions He brings, in His own good time, the star-bright flame of holy love. Upon ministries immeasurably lower and feebler than the ministries of the angels whom He charges with folly, He smiles His priceless approval, recompensing even the cup of cold water that has been given in the name of a disciple.

But is there no contradiction in these views? Do they not seem to run in very opposite directions? I think not. Perhaps they may be even seen to sustain each other.

Only He who is infinitely holy can afford to be absolutely gracious and gentle. His very greatness enables Him to stoop. If He is higher than the angel, He can dare to bend Himself to the bruised reed. Some human judges cannot afford to be magnanimous. They are always thinking of themselves. They are haunted by the fear of possible rivalry. Not a little of the acrimonious criticism by which we are deluged in every department of life, rests upon sheer envy. The commonplace poet, or artist, or musician very rarely recognises the merit of a rival. Whatever your particular pursuit may be, if your work has any real worth or promise about it, you will get the highest praise and encouragement from the man whose genius is the highest. He is free to recognise the brotherhood of genius and research. And it is so in morals. If you want to crush the erring and the impotent, the pharisee of mediocre virtue will always be the most effective instrument for the invidious task. Less consummate perfection is always more querulous in dealing with imperfection than is supreme perfection itself. It is ethical inferiority that is most peevish and impatient with failing. It is said that deer will kill wounded members of the herd. Some of us act by a standard very little higher than that. We are always ready to rush upon the sickly and the defective and ill-favoured in the Church. God's rigour is not a rigour of that type. His rectitude is immaculately strict, but not with the cruel, envious, impatient strictness of the carping and miserable pharisee. The incomparably holy dare to stoop to blemish and frailty and weakness, and help it out of its dark and humiliating conditions. There is no contradiction here. Only He who is so far above the angels that He charges them with folly, can bend to replenish the spring of penitential tears in a woman that was a sinner, and

beam grace and acceptance upon the gathering crowds of weary outcasts.

And then again only the infinitely holy can discern the hidden promise and possibility of holiness in the weak and the erring. The intense moral life that makes Him quick to discern the defect of the angel makes Him equally quick to discern the faintest dawn and forecast of goodness in the repenting sinner. The powerful magnet will pick out, in the powdered dust of the iron stone, fine particles of metal that a second or third-rate magnet would fail to draw to itself. And so God, because of His higher and more perfect righteousness, discovers the dim earnest of a far-off moral life and perfection, where neither man nor angel can detect it. It would be an awful thing if we were left to suppose that God was microscopic in His scrutiny for judgment and condemnation only, and not also for blessing and approval. The crystalline purity that enables Him to see the blemish that escapes our introspection, enables Him also to see the spiritual promise, hidden in dim and dark horizons that are beyond our power to scan. If there were a proposal to select a hundred students to be trained in the Royal Academy of Music, you would not entrust the responsibility of picking out the candidates of highest promise to the fiddler of the village green or the leader of some rural choir. You would recognise the principle, that the most accomplished musician in the land would be much more likely to discern the signs of high possibility in these half-trained children, than a musician of an inferior order. Your second-rate man would be so busy spying out imperfection, that he would overlook the subtle indications of power hidden away under all the blunders of execution. The sensibilities of the perfect musician would be tortured by the signs of ignorance and carelessness in the performances of the candidates he was examining, but his high, sensitive, musical faculty would enable him to detect faint glimmerings of latent talent where others would pass it by. And so with God. He discerns hope and fine possibility all the more keenly through the very affluence of His own purity. Only He who is intensely holy can have that passionate sympathy with holiness that will inspire for the patient task of cherishing the weakest types and most rudimentary forms of holiness. None but the incomparably righteous could bring Himself to cherish those lowly ones in whom righteousness exists in but infinitesimal degrees. That He does not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax, nor overlook in His awards the cup of cold water, is, after all, but a sign of how holy He is, and of the

high price He therefore puts upon the faintest trace and anticipation of spiritual excellence in His people. And is not the very rigour of His righteousness a pledge that we shall be equitably judged? He may see fit to remind the angel of his limitation, but there is no reproach where the limitation is inseparable from a stage of growth, and verges upon the limitation of necessity. With drawbacks in my associations and surroundings, I would rather be judged by such a God than by a god of ill-braced and lukewarm rectitudes and less delicate equities. The perfection of righteousness is realized in the perfection of love. The severest rectitude and the most condescending gentleness in His treatment of bruised and mourning and contrite spirits, blend into one.

If these views be true, what profound reverence is always binding on us in God's presence! How the holiest in our midst will need to be ever humbling himself afresh! We do well to speak, and that boldly, of sanctification from sin; but remember that there is no finality of attainment for us either here or hereafter. The angels have not reached it. Let the angel be arrested at the line of his present life and achievement, and he becomes a transgressor. All holiness consists in endless, unresting movement towards God. Stagnation in the high and holy things of the present is a crime against the eternal law of heaven. If God charges the angels with folly, how deep the self-humiliation we are called to cultivate! God's own image, and that alone, is the ideal by which we must be content to measure ourselves. He would have us copy nothing else, not even the angel. And yet do not let this high demand discourage us. He Himself will never cease to help our effort and to inspire our ardour.

II.

THE DIVINE BLESSEDNESS.

"The Creator, who is blessed for ever."—*Rom.* i. 25.
"The blessed and only Potentate."—*1 Tim.* vi. 15.

THE two Greek words employed by the apostle in the two texts before us are quite distinct from each other in derivation, although they combine in ultimate meaning. The word used in the Epistle to the Romans describes a blessedness realized in virtue of the invocation, decree, or promise of another. The word has its Hebrew synonym in the Old Testament passages that speak of holy and believing men being blessed by the word, good-will and faithful care of God,—blessed for the most part in the tranquil and prosperous condition of their outward lives. When God is described as the object of devout and grateful and intelligent worship, it is this same word that is used. He is "blessed" in the praise and adoration of His people. Their whole desire is for the accomplishment of His will, the prosperity of His kingdom, and the ever-widening honour of His name. There is a sense in which God's Spirit is gladdened and satisfied by the sincere homage thus paid to Him without ceasing from the lips and the hearts of His true servants. God is blessed by the enduring worship of His people, in contrast to the fugitive falsehoods and idolatries of the passing hour that seem to dishonour His majesty. But the word employed in the Epistle to Timothy is a profounder word. It points to a happiness which belongs to essential character, a happiness that is entirely inward. In classical Greek, I believe, the word is rarely if ever used to describe the happy estate of men in the present life, but is almost entirely limited to representations of the condition of the gods and the glorious dead. In the New Testament, the word is not so narrow in its range of application. It is used to describe the happy lot and disposition of God's

servants and followers, notably in the Sermon on the Mount. But it still describes a happiness that is inward and received from God. We may accept then the words in Timothy as a description of God's own essential life and blessedness, a blessedness that does not primarily rest upon the worship or service offered by the creature. The two ideas will blend into each other as we follow them out. The psalmist seems to have recognised the essential blessedness of God's nature. "In His presence is fulness of joy." God could not be the spring of joy to others unless He were an eternal beatitude in Himself. The nature whose touch brings gladness to others must itself be blessed. This latent truth of the Old Testament is beautifully emphasised in the writings of St. Paul.

I. It is much easier for us to realize the blessedness of God when we think of His *derivative* rather than of His *essential* and *eternal blessedness*. We project our view into the future. We see God with a holy, harmonious, and glorified universe around Him. His purposes have had an indescribably magnificent issue. Far as mind can travel there are to be found blooms and fruits that have been propagated from His own glorious and beneficent life and character. Under such conditions, it is not difficult to join in the common anthem which declares that He is infinitely and eternally blessed.

Let us approach this mysterious and profoundly interesting subject from the easiest standpoint, *that of the future*. We project our vision through dim ages yet to come. Populations, in comparison with which the past populations of the earth are but a handful, have received through the process of their redemption a high moral enrichment of incalculable worth. The secret of Him whose name is Love has been breathed into their hearts and diffused through all the subtle channels of conduct and character, and they have been made partakers of the Divine blessedness. The curse has gone from the universe, like an old dream of terror that troubled a long-forgotten night of childhood. No trace of it is left. Terrible whilst it lasted, God's ministry of beneficent tenderness and patience and forgiving generosity has at last abolished it from the hearts and lives of men. All nations have been blessed in Him, and they stand before the throne of this solitary Potentate of love, and call Him blessed in their songs. George Eliot, in one of the closing months of her life, said to a friend with whom she was conversing, "that she believed the time would come when the altruistic instinct would become so deeply

implanted in human nature, that there would be just as spontaneous a movement to stretch out the hand and help human weakness and peril and sorrow, wherever found, as there would be on her part to catch that vase if it were falling," pointing to a delicate and elegant Greek vase on the mantelpiece. Well, that dream of a semi-christian agnosticism has been more than realized. God's innate blessedness has been transfused into numbers no arithmetic can compute. Our arithmetic sometimes deals with vast numbers. It took our astronomers two or three years to work out the data by which the distance of the sun from the earth was accurately determined. But no finite arithmetic can grapple with these numbers. And these redeemed millions have been made one with the pure and everlasting Son. Whatever joy that Son gave the heart of the Father these give likewise; for the prayer has been richly answered, that the love wherewith the Father loved the Son may be in them and He in them. They not only bless and praise the Son in their songs, but they have that supreme mark of truth in worship, they are eager to copy the beneficence that has won their supreme adoration. If there were fresh worlds to be redeemed, and they could do it by their service and sacrificial agony, not one of these uncounted millions would decline the task, for the Son who gave Himself a ransom for many is in them. The name of the Father is on every forehead. The effulgence of the infinite love reflects itself upon every brow. Possibly they may aspire to self-forgetting service and vicarious pain, just as we here upon earth so ignobly crave for ease and rest and the pleasures of the soothed senses. And this beneficent spirit, which puts the stamp of unmistakable benignity upon every part of the universe, issued from the spring of the Divine blessedness itself. The blended triumph and complacency and accomplished hope of all earthly fatherhood is a little thing in comparison with that. The spirit of the Son with whom the Father was ever well pleased has become, I will not say the law of all life, for law implies more or less of bondage and compulsion, but its deepest and most spontaneous instinct. God has done more than abolish pain. He might have done that without lifting the creature into likeness with Himself and adoring fellowship with His throne. He has made His creatures *instruments* in the abolition of pain. He has caused endless hearts to vibrate with the same sympathy as His own, countless hands to be quick and beautiful with the same holy service and ministry. In spirits many as the sands of the sea, He has implanted the foundation motives of His own help and

saving love, and has drawn them into the same circle of sacred joy with Himself. No power can rival now the assimilating power of His goodness. He is the only Potentate. All other types of power are impotence in comparison. And His influence is the influence of His own inherent blessedness. When we look at God from this standpoint, it is not difficult to conceive of Him as infinitely and endlessly blessed.

But I may be reminded that if we look at God's infinite and unfathomable blessedness from the standpoint of the far-off future, the subject is not without its difficulties. Is there no reservation in that blessedness? The empyrean may be quivering with splendour; unceasing songs of gladness and worship may be surging through its vast spaces; every breast in the great multitude may throb with Divine charity, and every heart overflow with unspeakable spiritual contentment: but what about the stain on the remote horizon? On the far-off confines of all this blessedness, is there not the smoke of a torment that ascendeth up for ever and ever? Whilst there is one world of unwashed guilt and unabated pain in the universe, can God's great pitying heart be quite at rest? Well, in God's ripe summer time evil will be insignificant beyond degree in comparison with good. Do not suppose that the ratio between good and evil will always be what it was when Christ spoke of the few that were saved, or even what it is now. I do not wonder at your difficulties on the subject of retribution if you have suffered that idea to entrench itself in your mind. Evil will shrink to ever-diminishing proportions in the uncounted centuries yet to be. In the quiet night the heavens breathe their wealth of dew upon the fields and moors and forests of half a continent. In all that flood of purity and sweetness you can scarcely find the dewdrop that has distilled itself into the cup of the nightshade, and absorbed its poison. For many a hundred miles the trellised vines on the hills spread their proud clusters before the autumn sun. You may travel for days before you find the one solitary vine that has been smitten with mildew. Uncounted suns glitter and pulsate through the mighty Milky Way. The astronomer may search for months before he can find the sun whose light has been quenched. The summer purples with its solid sheets of bloom the mountain slopes of a great continent. You would have to search for long before you could find the handful of flowers nipped by the east wind. And so, in God's great summer, evil will be lost and forgotten in the abounding and transcendent victory of good. Do not suppose God made a race,

knowing that in the climax of all its history evil would preponderate or bear any noticeable proportion to good. Do not form your views of God and retribution from what you happen to see now. Evil will be lost in the prevalence of good, and God's blessedness prove itself vast and measureless.

But some one may be ready to say, "Does not this view run counter to the teaching in the parable of the Good Shepherd, who was constrained by His own pity to leave the ninety and nine, and seek that which was lost? To say that God's blessedness will be perfect, because final good will out-balance final evil, is to reverse the parable, and make the Good Shepherd forget the lost unit in His delight in the ninety and nine, the great saved majority." Well, if the lost one *could* still be brought back, I have no doubt the Good Shepherd would be full of solicitude, allowing Himself no rest till He had laid it on His shoulders, and trodden the last glad step of the homeward march again. But I know of no law of beneficence that compels the Shepherd to tarry in the wilderness, when the wanderer fights with implacable stubbornness the hand that seeks to guide it back to peace and salvation. I know of no law of beneficence which compels the Shepherd to tarry in the wilderness with sighs when the wanderer rushes into thickets where it is hopeless and impossible to follow it. I know of no law of beneficence which compels the Shepherd to sit down by the carcase of His lost sheep, like Rizpah by the bones of her sons, and rend the air with incessant lamentation. In that case the ninety and nine might have sound cause of complaint. They might be justified in passing severe strictures upon the Shepherd who thought so much of the hopeless carcase of the wicked and foolish wanderer, and so little of the ninety and nine who had heard the Shepherd's voice and were ready to follow Him in all things, and had some right to be led out into the sunshine. There was a Divine philosophy in the conduct of David, who wept and fasted for the child whilst there was life, and then washed his face and ate bread as soon as the life had passed beyond recall. God would be untrue to the claims of the saved if He were so full of regrets for the lost few, that He could not rejoice with infinite gladness over the saved multitudes and suffer unreprieved the songs in which they declare Him infinitely and eternally blessed.

"But was not God the Father of these lost ones? Can a father's heart ever cease to feel the sting of his child's profligacy and pain? Can a father be perfectly blessed whilst a single child

remains in uncanceled sin and abiding torment? The earthly father may disown his child, but by that disownment he cannot dispel the haunting shadow that steals across his path. Is God less perfect in tenderness than an earthly father, that He should be supremely blessed whilst His universe still has a hell simmering at its most distant pole?" No ; He is more perfect, and that very perfection shields Him from the shadow the perdition of the finally impenitent might cast upon His blessedness. It is a sense of his own weakness and imperfection that makes it impossible for the earthly parent ever to forget the hopelessly estranged and depraved child, not because his tenderness or sympathy transcend the tenderness and sympathy of God. What is it that haunts the mind of the parent, and keeps him tossing upon his pillow for years, as he thinks of a child fallen beyond hope of reclamation? It is the sense of possible failure in himself. There is the shadow of a faint, hypothetical remorse resting like the chill of death upon his heart. "If I had guided more wisely ; if I had spoken more softly ; if I had prayed more passionately, or prayed to greater effect by the exercise of a vigorous and unwavering faith ; if I had sympathised more ungrudgingly with all the recreations natural to young life ; if I had made the child more frankly and constantly my companion, possibly the issue might have been otherwise. I am innocent of any great studied neglect of principle, but, oh ! I might have done so much more." In the parent's unending pain there is some element, diluted it may be to an almost inappreciable degree, of self-condemnation and reproach. But no thought akin to that can be awakened in the Divine mind by contemplating the condition of the lost. Whatever the suffering which convulses the world of impenitence and woe, He has not contributed to it. God could not be perfectly happy if He had left a single thing undone to save men. In respect of the damned even He has the blessedness of knowing that He has done for them all that infinite love and patience and resource could. He has the satisfaction of knowing that His only Son lavished His life to avert that terrible issue. He has the satisfaction of knowing that the spirit of the Son has entered into the disciples of that Son, and that they have lavished thought and zeal and strength and love to turn from destruction those who are now found in a state of incurable impenitence and woe.

In the second Epistle to the Corinthians there is a passage we may have been tempted to think harsh and mysterious and forbidding, that just touches the question before us, "We are a

sweet-smelling savour to God in Christ in them that are saved." That is clear and intelligible enough. But the Apostle is equally emphatic in presenting the other side of the subject. "We are to God a sweet-smelling savour in Christ in them that perish." Does not that seem harsh and inexplicable? Round about the very perdition of the impenitent there is a circle of influences and associations that are acceptable to God. If you have lost a child by death, you know what a satisfaction it is to you to remember that all the medical skill that money could command was brought to bear, all that kind and unceasing ministrations of tenderness could do to save the precious life was done. Friends were hour by hour coming to the door ready to help, to sympathise, to pray; by-and-by thoughts of these things became a great solace to you, and you could bow yourself to the inevitable. Your life might have been shadowed to the very end, if there had been carelessness, neglect, indifference at any single point; if friends had been slow to help, advise, condole; if expedients for the salvation of the child could have been afterwards devised that you never thought of at the time. And so with God, as He looks upon the second death of those created in His own image. There is no sting of regretful reflection. The possible was done to its very last detail. All is quiet contentment and satisfaction. God did more than He had ever done for His universe before. The Son thought no sacrifice too great. The servants and disciples of the Son forgot all thoughts of self in their endeavours to save men. The perdition of the impenitent man is a terrible fact, but round about that fact there ever gather unselfish ministries and services upon which God looks with contentment, and which maintain the unbroken tenor of His blessedness. "We are a sweet-smelling savour to God in them that perish."

You say, "He might have withheld the freedom through the misuse of which these men have damned themselves." Possibly He might: but the alternative implied in that has nothing to commend it. What would have been involved in the refusal of moral freedom? Not only that there should be no hell, but no heaven likewise, for there is no freedom if it can be exercised only in one direction. That would have drawn the curtain of an everlasting darkness over the blessed spectacle now spread about His feet. That would have been a gigantic act of spiritual infanticide, the wrong of which would have poisoned the Divine blessedness for ever. That would have been to create a vast negative hell of privation and frustrated gladness, in place of a limited positive

hell of incurable perversity and woe. God could not have been infinitely beneficent and infinitely joyful in His essential spirit if He had done that. That would have blasted the vast possibilities of moral life and grandeur and happiness, latent in the universe. If God does all that His great heart can devise and all that His mighty hand can achieve for the uplifting of human life, and if what He has done issues in the complete sanctity and blessedness of a vast preponderating majority of those whom He has called into being, God is without qualification infinitely and endlessly blessed.

II. Let us see if we can realize God's blessedness from the *standpoint of the present*. That is much more difficult than to realize how God will be blessed for ever, when in the ages to come His beneficent purposes shall have been fulfilled, His kingdom perfected, and the Spirit of His Son made to fill all things. How are we to reconcile God's blessedness with the suffering under which man is daily writhing, and the sin in which he takes such perverted delight? If a mother lay in a trance, conscious of all that was going on around her, but unable to move a finger, and suddenly heard the cry of concentrated pain from her little one, could she be blessed? And God seems to be present in every scene of human woe, listening to shrieks and sobs and convulsive appeals to His pity; and, yet by some mysterious and self-imposed law He finds Himself unable to interpose. How can He be infinitely blessed whilst His watching Spirit is present in this world of unresting anguish, and His mighty powers of help have to lie in dumb and motionless paralysis? The human parent is spared the pain of looking upon the actual scene and circumstances of the child's profligacy and shame. A new touch of bitterness would come to the parental heart, but for the veil between the eye of the parent and the actual scene of the child's falsity and transgression. God is looking with unveiled eye upon every offence and disloyalty and shameful act of the child.

One hot summer morning, long before daybreak, I wandered through the strange streets of a Japanese city. The Japanese houses are built of very thin board, and the different rooms of the houses are separated from each other by paper partitions only. I cannot describe the strange, ghostly sensations that took possession of my mind. I could hear the tick of every clock in the houses by which I passed. The air was hot and motionless, and the house fronts seemed to act as sounding boards. I could hear the very breath and restless turnings and movements of the sleepers behind these

thin partitions. And I thought within myself : Is it not thus with God as He walks in silence and darkness through the ranks of men in this strange world of ours? He hears every quick, troubled breath, every throb of pain, every murmur of disloyalty, every insult to His authority, every restless movement of the heart in this vast congregation of life. The world is like a great hospital. Every cry passes into His ear as by some secret telephone. The world is a mortuary chapel, filled with a pale, red-eyed crowd of mourners that never grows less. The subdued boom of the endless lamentation is ever striking upon His ear. The world is little better than a rebel camp. Ever rebel boast, every blasphemy against His name, every anarchic council is awfully audible. With all these blended miseries within constant reach and knowledge, how can He be perfectly blessed? Do not all these things banish all the gladness from the Divine life? The least sensitive man in our midst could not bear them for an hour.

It may be asked, "Is not God's present relation to pain a qualification of His blessedness?" He lives in the presence of perpetual pain, it is true, but then He is ever exercising a ministry of pity and healing to pain, and there is no pause in the unseen work of that ministry; and the satisfactions it yields more than transcend the touch of possible grief that may be the germ of His sympathy. Have you ever observed some nervous, highly wrought woman in the presence of accident, calamity, disaster? Emotion is overstrained. She is brought by the excess of grief to the verge of temporary madness. Commit to her some trifling ministry of help; let her be told to fetch a glass of water, to bathe a wound, to prepare a bandage, and the license of grief is held in perfect rein, and she becomes calm as an angel in her little service of kindness, if not positively happy. The grief has been neutralized by the sweet satisfactions inherent in a ministry of help and love. The sorrow we feel in the contemplation of pain seems to have been put within us to impel us to succour and helpfulness, and the sorrow ceases when it leads on to the act it is designed to stimulate. And so, in ways unseen, God is ever helping and healing. Nature itself is endued with something of the self-same virtue that dwelt pre-eminently in God's Son, and the healing movement is always in progress. Sorrow does not cast an unrelieved shadow upon the actively beneficent. The people whose lives are employed in mitigating pain are always the happiest of their kind, however depressing their surroundings. Sorrow only casts its shadow upon the idly sentimental. The blessedness God realizes through His

secret ministry to sorrow, protects Him against the shadow that the spectacle of widespread human suffering might otherwise cast upon His gladness.

And then God's blessedness can suffer no eclipse from contact with pain, because it is His will to make pain the vehicle for the manifestation of conspicuous tenderness. How many sub-acid, cynical men and women are there who have only felt and recognised the sympathy and affection of their kind in the hour of some great weakness and affliction. They look back as to some green oasis in the desert of hot, weary, loveless lives to the time when they were prostrate with pain, and were constrained to confess that there were unsuspected depths of gentleness and goodwill sleeping in the hearts of their friends. Although the human heart in its perversity *may* make of suffering a curse, it is God's will to make it a point in our wilderness lives at which sweet, secret springs of Divine and human sympathy shall arise and blend with each other, and create magic balm and beauty and freshness. When God's purpose is accomplished, He makes His servants to glory in their tribulations; and when men glory in their tribulations God glories with them, and in that case His blessedness is not sensibly impaired or embittered by pain.

And then God's blessedness is not overshadowed by human pain, even when rescue and healing from His presence tarry for awhile, because by pain God is teaching us sympathy with each other, and conformity to His own pattern of helpfulness and high beneficence. God would much rather heal pain and succour weakness and dispel blackness and despair, by your hand and mine, than by His own right hand, because by these high activities of heart and life we become like God, and enter into a grander fellowship with His nature. God very often does not Himself help and heal because He wants you and me to do it. God is blessed in the very pains of His creatures, solemnly blessed and satisfied in their dire woe and tribulation, when woe and pain and tribulation teach His people to be full of kindness and compassion to each other, and raise them to share in the majesty and high satisfactions of His own ministry to a tossed and disconsolate humanity. He looks on pain, it is true, but on the pain in contact with the spirit and life of Jesus Christ, as that spirit and life diffuse themselves through the mystic body of which you and I are members. His infinite blessedness remains unclouded.

And yet again, God looks upon pain from the standpoint of that wider epoch when sorrow and sighing shall have fled away; and

pain so viewed cannot darken His ineffable gladness. God would not mock our bereavements with the light, He would not look down from smiling heavens upon eyes red with weeping, and hands clenched in convulsive grief or raised in unavailing deprecation, but for the fact that He views our sorrow as a short dream in the life that is but as "a watch in the night." When the light comes in through your darkened windows, and seems to jibe at your desolation with its serenity, remember that the light but reflects the eternal thought of God, and God is ever looking at your sorrow from the large perspective of the everlasting ages. What a little thing the pain and sickness of your childhood is, when you look at it through the vista of years! You would not take the trouble to cancel the memory of your early pain, if you could. Mental pain, of course, belongs to a different category. Physical pain once passed becomes of no account to us. God looks at all suffering from the standpoint of the painless millenniums that are soon to sweep upon us; and, contemplated from that standpoint, all the tribulations of the Church weigh no more than the ailments of our babyhood weigh with us to-day. Pain is nothing when passed, and, regarded from the standpoint of the Eternal, it is as though it were passed already.

Death itself, many as may be the earthly years it has darkened, cannot stain with the mists of night the joy that springs from God's presence. The shadow of death is ever flitting round the world faster than summer shadows across the waving grass. So sad, so solemn, so unknown to us, it is a very different thing as God sees it. Some little time ago the *Lancet* gave an account of a series of operations performed upon a young lady who had been blind from her childhood. The operations themselves were not painful, but the terror created by the returning power of sight was excruciating. The lady begged to be spared the further processes necessary for her complete restoration. She wished to remain in blindness. She felt as though she were always standing upon the brink of a precipice. But the doctor felt no remorse. He knew that his patient would by-and-by rejoice in the faculty of sight. So when death takes the scales from our sight. The revelation is full of terror. We seem to be standing on the verge of a precipice. But the beneficent issue of the process is more than a counterpoise to its pain. The work of death does not embitter the blessedness of God. By-and-by death, like pain, will be no more.

But sin is worse than suffering. Is not the present existence

and activity of sin a qualification of the Divine blessedness? It is in the hearts of parents that the sweetest joys as well as the sharpest sorrows of human life are to be found. That relation has its terrible contingencies. The father by the very relation into which he has come, and by the very process of loving his children, has given to those children a strange power of wounding him through their disobedience and ingratitude. But the joy and sorrow both spring from the same root, the capacity for moral thought and life and emotion in the children. The very love that makes him sensitive to ingratitude and offence on the part of the wayward child attunes his nature to multitudinous contentments and gratifications that may reach him through the right conduct of dutiful and loving children. God looks upon the race in Jesus Christ. He looks into the future, and He sees the coming members of the race transformed into the holy image of His first-born Son. He may see the prodigal in his unholy riot. That is the fleeting image of the moment. He sees the restored prodigal welcomed back within the household. That is the reality that abides. He sees men in sin. But they are learning its bitterness, learning it just as fast as they can, and they will have completely mastered the lesson by-and-by. He may hear the music to whose seductive strains the prodigal is listening in the haunts of harlotry, and that is the murmur in the sea shell. He hears also the music and gladness in the homes whose vacant places have just been filled again, and that is the pealing anthem of an everlasting ocean. In that anthem the faint murmurs in the shells that strew the shore are swallowed up and forgotten.

The Divine fatherhood is something higher than human fatherhood. Human fatherhood has in it the taint of evil. It gives, but it seeks a prompt and hearty love in return. It has not fully learnt the lesson that it is more blessed to give than to receive. God is blessed, as no human being can be, by the rich bounty of His own giving. In relation to every child in His great estranged family He has some blessedness, the blessedness that is supreme, the blessedness of giving with matchless lavishness. Whether or not He has the inferior blessedness of receiving back from that child filial love and service and trust, nothing can alienate from Him this heritage of joy.

There are terrible contingencies connected with the gift of free will. But we must never forget the profound theology in the simple parable of the marriage feast. Whoever may reject the grace of God, the magnificent bounty of the Divine King cannot

be wasted. Then there *would be* a qualification to the Divine blessedness. God will find countless recipients for the bounty His great love has made ready ; if not amongst pharisees, then amongst publicans ; if not amongst Jews, then amongst Gentiles ; if not in the men of this generation, then in uncounted generations yet to come. In spite of the sins that grow up through man's moral freedom, God's gladness is perfect. His eye already sees the banquet filled, and His heart is satisfied.

III. Let us try and realize God's infinite and absolute blessedness *in relation to the past*. We go back to the mysterious epochs when the worlds had not issued upon their courses. How can we reconcile the Divine blessedness with solitude ? There can be no blessedness without beneficence, and no beneficence without a relation.

Well, the beneficence of *character* that was the spring of all after triumph and achievement was there. The righteousness and purity and love that were to be exercised in the relations to be afterwards constituted, were already living and conscious forces. And God could not be morally perfect without being infinitely blessed in Himself. The nature, the vision of which should one day make the creature blessed for ever, was already there in all its completeness and moral majesty.

More still : the Son, who was to be the instrument for the accomplishment of all the Father's vast and holy and loving purposes, was already a willing instrument in the Father's bosom. And in the life of that Son every soul was reflected that was to be afterwards united by faith to Him as its Saviour and Head. The great multitude that no man could number had its existence in God's thought from the beginning. We need not be afraid of the doctrines of foreknowledge and eternal election. Those doctrines will not necessarily give a fatalistic bias to our beliefs. We cannot shut them out from our thought without impairing our conception of God's eternal and absolute blessedness. Literary artists sometimes identify themselves in a remarkable way with the characters that are the offspring of their imagination only. They have shed tears over the pains and reverses of the characters they have painted in their pages, and have been in ecstasies for days over the good fortune to which they thought fit to bring them at the breaking of the clouds.

And is it not thus with the mind of God ? That mind has been peopled from the beginning with the forms of those who were afterwards to be, not the figures of a romance only, but profound

realities upon the platform of human life and action. And towards all these, the Divine love has been pouring itself out from everlasting. And thus before all worlds God has been indescribably gladdened by the anticipation of a triumphant future of redeemed and regenerated life. He is blessed from all ages.

But the question may be asked : " Does not this view of the eternal blessedness of God preclude the possibility of sympathy ? How can the eternal God enter into the fleeting sorrows of time ? Can He grieve for us in our grief and shame ? Does not the vast perspective in His vision seem to exclude every trace of affinity and sensitive relation with our mortal life ? " Just as the human eye has different focal lengths, and can adjust itself to the different degrees in which light may be diffused with a quickness of movement that can scarcely be measured, so the Divine mind can mysteriously combine into one the view of life opening itself at the standpoint of time, and that other view opening itself at the standpoint of eternity. Indeed, in the person of Jesus Christ He has given us precious and permanent proof of the fact that He *can* bring Himself under the conditions of time, looking at sorrow and sin from our own levels, and transcending all human brotherhood and friendship in the perfectness of His sympathy.

Come day by day to God, the spring of infinite gladness. Let your converse with Him be unbroken. Be imitators of Him in all things. You will find your adoption into God's family a sheer fiction, unless that adoption issue in making you like your Father in all things. You cannot taste God's blessedness unless you love, pity, forgive, help, lift up the fallen on every hand, and abound without weariness in well-doing, like God. " Be ye therefore merciful, even as your Father which is in heaven is merciful."

III.

GOD GLORIFIED BY MYSTERY.

“It is the glory of God to conceal a thing.”—*Prov.* xxv. 2.

DO we not commonly judge our fellow-men by a maxim, the very reverse of that here given to guide us in our thoughts of God? We assume that we have claims upon the confidence of the people with whom we are brought into association, and account it a shame for them to hide their affairs from our knowledge. We resent reserve, secrecy, isolation, almost as sharply as though they were moral transgressions. We are attracted by frankness, and make the man our ideal saint who “wears his heart upon his sleeve.” The hero of an entertaining French novel falls in love with a beautiful mummy of which he has become the happy possessor; but French imagination itself would scarcely be equal to the task of making the sphinx, with its calm, stony smile of everlasting riddle and mystery, captivating to the most susceptible nature. The best hated men the world has had in it have always been men of silence. The taciturn habit of William the Third kept him from being loved in proportion to his virtues. It is easy to recall leaders in political, ecclesiastical, and social life who never had friends, and who never cared to make them. The dignity of apartness and the weird fascination they could exert over weak and timid natures by their supercilious reserves weighed far more with them than the pleasures arising from close, confidential companionships. Mystery is one of the arts of crafty ambition, for the silly world is generally ready to accept silence for wisdom. The influence of the Grand Llama of Tibet rests upon the fact that he is jealously screened from the common view. An enlightened age will always resent such devices. The ecclesiastical law-makers who decreed that the pope should dine apart, scarcely realized of how much love that arrogant piece of etiquette would deprive him

in the last days of the world's revolt against artificial privilege. Men sometimes cultivate the habit of concealment, so that they may pass themselves off for better than they really are. A calculated reserve of that sort is always a shame to a man. Men sometimes practise reserve, so that they may circumvent opposition and accomplish their own crafty aims the more adroitly. Such a reserve we always regard as infamous. Men sometimes hide their affairs from us because they are indifferent to our advice, sympathy, co-operation. We of course condemn a reserve which reflects contempt upon ourselves, in proportion to the degree of our self-respect.

But reserve is not always ignoble. Emergencies may arise in which it is a crime to babble, and the refusal of a confidence to those best entitled to claim it may be the truest heroism. Strong and noble and unselfish qualities sometimes determine a man's silence. A touching modesty of character or a wholesome and magnanimous independence may sometimes lead a man to hide his affairs from others. He does not care to intrude or impose himself upon the attention of those who have sufficient cares and responsibilities of their own. The business man veils his cares and worries and losses from the sensitive family circle to which he returns at the close of the day. A great wrong has been suffered, but there is no trumpeting of that wrong to the world. The Spartans are not all gone, and many a sturdy hero lets the hidden fox gnaw at his life without giving the least sign to those who watch him. Whatever we may think of the family ethics of Enoch Arden, we acknowledge the high motive of the reserve he maintained, when he came back to find his place filled by another. He could not have disclosed his secret without wrecking the tranquil home into which he had looked. The welfare of an empire may sometimes turn upon the power a statesman has of keeping the counsel of a department. A whispered confidence might unbalance the impending avalanche and plunge a nation into war. We admire the strength and courage and moral fibre sometimes indicated by wise and beneficent reserve.

There are reservations in the knowledge that God has given us of His own nature, purpose, and government ; but these reservations always rest upon motives that are pure, noble and holy, and are identified with the highest glory of the Divine character. God keeps nothing back from us for our injury. He hides nothing in Himself from our understanding, so that He may put up barriers to keep us away from Himself. No mystery is meant to alienate

us from God, but to attach us in closer bonds. There is enough of knowledge open to bring us into communion with God ; yet enough at the same time of obscurity to test and exercise and strengthen our faith. Revelation and mystery are found in infinite alternation with each other. Do not allow mystery to become a pretext for scepticism, for mystery is not a term that is interchangeable with contradiction. Contradiction will justify your profoundest scepticism. But God expects your richest worship, to be presented within the sphere of mystery. "It is the glory of God to conceal a thing."

It is needless for us to define the area of mystery, if indeed that were possible. It starts in God, and covers the last outlying atom of His dominion. We find it under our feet as well as above us. One of our scientists has said that the most wonderful thing in the universe is that little filament of nerve we call "an ant's brain." By some secret that we cannot divine, it holds ideas as subtle and complex as those upon which our highest civilizations rest. How has this gossamer thread become charged with this wealth of wisdom and resource? Is it not a mystery that God has instituted for the glory of His power? We pass from the circumference to the centre. Think of the pure spirituality of God's being. We can find no symbol for it. All our thoughts and activities are related to cerebral processes. "Three Persons in one God," as the creeds define those mysterious elements of the Divine life and consciousness presented to us in the pages of the Bible. Many an honest truthseeker has stumbled over this mystery, and I could almost wish at times that the early councils had not attempted to define so much. The subject is incomprehensible. The nearest analogy we can find to help us is the curious pathological fact that the human brain seems to fold within itself the germ of a second consciousness and a second personality, and that under certain extraordinary circumstances, that germ becomes the starting-point for the development of a new personal consciousness. Perhaps the early Fathers erred by an excessive dogmatism of definition. I am quite sure we are in danger of erring by an excessive dogmatism of denial. The factors of personality sometimes overlap each other, and it is impossible to draw a rigid line of demarcation between them. The dual nature in Jesus Christ is another branch of the same great mystery. And the moral mysteries of God's government are just as profound as the mysteries of His essential Being. We cannot see the last depth in the doctrine of human redemption. We talk about this and that and the other element in

the atonement ; but it seems to me that there is a hidden significance in it, of which the prophet never dreamed in his holiest ecstasies. God's rule of the universe is an enigma. No theory fits all the facts. How full of problems the judgment of mankind ! How can all the principles Christ laid down be applied in that judgment ? We cannot realize the character of our future life. Material images do not help us to a very clear conception of what the disembodied state will be. We are obliged to rest our faith in it on God's character, and not on the changing symbols of human speech ; and when we do that, God is glorified by the very hiding of His counsels.

I. There are mysteries in the Divine nature and government that bear *direct witness to the glory of God's person*.

He holds back many things from us to remind us of His own unapproachable majesty and perfection.

The silence He maintains is a *sign of His self-sufficiency*. Men cultivate frank habits in their relations with each other to engage the sympathy, approval, co-operation that may be necessary to them in doing the work of their lives. There is a certain amount of truth in the popular idea that loquacious people are not distinguished by mental robustness. In some respects it is a beautiful thing to see people confiding in each other's sympathy and goodwill, but after all, it is a mark of our common human frailty and helplessness. We are so weak we must be stimulated and reinforced by the interaction of mind with mind, and we invite this necessary incitement by telling the tale of our care and struggle and ambition into the ear of a neighbour. Not a little of the motive force we need to fully effect our work is stored up in the hearts around us, and frankness on our part establishes the line of communication necessary for the transmission of this force. How weak we are without these social bonds, weak in proportion to the very perfection of our civilizations ! The elaborate division of labour has weakened us. If deprived of the co-operation of our neighbours and of the stimulating motives that arise from our contact with them, we should go down into savages in a twelvemonth. We can only be kept up to our present levels by popular sentiment and popular sympathy, the action and interaction of mind on mind. We are not the solitary kings we sometimes think ourselves. Our very trustfulness, our eagerness to find some ear for our most sacred secrets, the satisfaction we find in unbosoming our hopes and cares and wrongs to those who are about us, are so many pathetic signs of finite dependence and frailty.

As a matter of privilege, God may permit us to enter into sympathy and co-operation with Himself and His work. But He does not need our help, and by the stern reserve in His revelations He asserts the separateness and the sufficiency of His own mighty power. God can do all but His highest moral work, if need be, without the co-operation of a single finite being. He is the great Atlas who takes upon His own solitary nature all the work of a universe measureless to us in either time or space, without stooping to the task or straining a single faculty in the effort. If He employ us at all, it is for our good, and not because of His need. It is by a wonderful exhibition of graciousness that He calls our labour a service to Himself, but He is not beholden to our help for the fulfilment of His designs. He permits and indeed invites that help, but His power is separate, sufficient, solitary. "With whom took He counsel, and who instructed Him, and showed to Him the path of judgment, and taught Him the way of understanding?" Has He babbled to you of the deep secret of life? Does He need the help of your amateur art to paint a single petal, that He must needs put the last secret of the sun at your feet? No wonder that our men of science fix a line beyond which, they assure us, investigation is useless and wasted. Perhaps they do not always fix it wisely, but religion would be imperfect without its agnosticisms. God has His secrets that are the sign of His own separate and out-soaring wisdom and might. When He closes up the vision, no mortal hand can unloose the seal. Does God interpret at once every providential enigma in your life? He needs only the co-operation of your faith, and not necessarily of your understanding also, that He may bring to benign fruitfulness all the unknown issues with which your life is fraught. Are you called to be a co-assessor with God in His work of judgment, that you would have Him pour all its secrets into your ear at once? Must the edicts of His throne go forth from amidst the wrangling and mere school-din of finite counsellors? God can do unhelped the work that is His own special prerogative. He does not need to debate its principles with you or me. His secrets symbolise a high authority that can never be transferred to another. In His revelations there are majestic and solemnising reserves that demand our reverence.

God conceals many things, to remind us of the *gulf that separates the glory of His nature from the dimness of all finite natures*. It is this truth that Solomon elsewhere expresses by the assertion, that "God is in heaven" and we are "upon earth." We occupy, and however high we rise must ever occupy, a platform

lower than God's throne. True, man has been made in God's image, and, to use the daring expression of St. Peter, he is to become a "partaker of the Divine nature," through the promises. Man is destined to more exalted and intimate communion with his Maker than any other being in the universe, and yet there are limitations upon his privilege necessitated by the very supremacy of God. The participation is not participation in everything embraced in the essential nature of God. At many points between Himself and us God interposes mysteries, abysses of impenetrable splendour, worlds of unbroken silence, the signs that closely as our natures may come to touch His, we are finite and He is infinite. There are secrets we cannot enter, counsels we cannot share, age-long problems, the solution of which we are not permitted to see. There are mysteries into which the angels desire to look, and that symbolise the separation of the sinless worlds of intelligence clustering about the feet of God from the unapproachable glory of the Most High. Rise higher still. Think of the Son who has been in the bosom of the Father from before all time. To assert the supreme authority of the Father, there was one solitary reservation between the Father and the Son. "Of that day and that hour knoweth no man, not even the Son of man, but the Father only." The silence of God tells us how separate and solitary He is in His grandeur. He would forfeit our reverence if He were to make His ineffable majesty and the deep things of His government as accessible to us as the common facts of our daily life. The lightning flash that should once and for all uncover all mysteries would eclipse that glory before which the angels veil themselves, and the angels would forget their reverence. He would forfeit His crown by a revelation without reserves in it. God can only bind His law upon us, and attract our faith, by maintaining His transcendence, and He can only maintain His transcendence, by veiling many of the sacred mysteries of His Being, as well as the judgments of His administration, from our common view. "Thy judgments are a mighty deep." "It is the glory of God to conceal a thing."

God conceals many things, so that throughout the successive stages of our destiny He may bring into our contemplation of His nature and works *elements of inexhaustible freshness*.

Reservations that are determined by motives of this type have an intimate relation to the glory of the Divine name. God is a jealous God, and most jealous over Himself. He can never suffer His own sublime personality to become a dull and barren

subject to the meditation of His worshippers. If we could know God exhaustively and at once, the thought of Him would soon become a monotonous truism and a distasteful platitude. There will be eternal surprises in the successive unfoldings of His person, character, government ; and the ground for these surprises is laid in the silences, obscurities, concealments that mingle themselves with the existing revelation. These mysteries are the hidden fountains from which His eternal freshness is to flow.

With the spread of every kind of knowledge, the earth itself is in danger of becoming somewhat trite to our taste. Like the well-thumbed textbook of our school life, its pages sometimes seem to offer little that is new, and tend to become a very weariness to our eyesight. People begin to yawn over it. A few centuries ago it was full of piquant mystery and absorbing interest. What did our forefathers know of Greece or Rome or Egypt or Persia or Babylon? What of the wonders of equatorial Africa, and the sources of the Nile? What of the Amazon, and the mighty forests and wonderful trees on its banks? What of Mexico and its ancient races and cities and monuments? But now the mysteries so full of power to allure the imagination are gone, the problems have been solved, and the circle of matter-of-fact knowledge has become almost as wide as the horizon of the earth itself. There are not many virgin peaks to be climbed or trackless jungles to be crossed, or new races to be discovered, or untouched literatures to be worked. Little is left to be done. Two untraversed spheres of mystery, two circles of land or ice or open sea still exist, to penetrate which men are willing to risk their lives. The secret of the poles still attracts adventure by its irresistible spell. If the poles are ever reached, the last page of the book will have been turned.

So with the mysteries that encircle the nature and the works of God. Some of these mysteries were mysteries of the moment only. The vision of God widened and they passed away. Some may endure for ages yet to come, and then vanish in the more perfect light. Some will last long as the eternal God Himself. Upon many hidden things the incarnation cast its sacred light, and they were revealed to babes. Problems that had baffled angels were solved in the death of Jesus Christ. Our exodus from the flesh will bring new accessions of knowledge, and when we see face to face, things inscrutable now will become clear as the cloudless noon. The revelations of the life to come will be gradual and progressive. The light of God and the Lamb that fills the golden

city will not irradiate every secret of God's being. In our most exalted and clear-seeing states we shall find polar centres of mystery in the person and government of God that will draw us by their everlasting fascination, but to the inmost heart of which we cannot pass. Like "the mist that kept the heart of Eden green," these overhanging clouds of mystery will preserve God's nature in unfading freshness for our enjoyment, contemplation, and fellowship through all the cycles of our immortality. We should weary of God if He were less than infinite in every aspect and direction ; and if He be infinite, there must be realms of mystery in His person and government that will open themselves to our apprehension only after the lapse of ages, and that will always surpass knowledge. Mystery is the handmaid of God's infinitude. If God's revelation were a revelation of exhaustive fulness, a revelation with no reserved questions in it, the very enchantment of God's nature would be gone, and the splendour of His work would vanish like a short tropical sunset. "It is the glory of God to conceal a thing."

II. God is glorified by mystery, because *mystery has its place in the discipline and exaltation of human character.*

If our life bear God's image, whatever brings elements of strength, refinement, moral splendour into our lives must reflect new honour upon the name of God. The veiled truth sometimes calls out a higher faith, a more chastened resignation, a more childlike obedience in God's people, than the truth that is unveiled. Such an end sufficiently justifies God's silence and reservation upon questions we are restless to have settled.

God conceals many things, so that He may be magnified through His *people's trust in darkness and uncertainty.* The surpassing confidence and affection called forth towards Himself in the sphere of deep and unbroken mystery redounds in a pre-eminent degree to the honour of His name.

If mystery were the only thing with which we had to deal, it could never excite our faith. No genuine spirit of trust can spring up in ignorance. In God's dealings with us, profound silence and ringing oracle, the hidden and the revealed, the mystery and the defined truth, always alternate with each other. The questions with which the universe challenges our thought divide themselves into two categories. There are "the secret things that belong unto God," and "the things that are revealed, which belong to us and to our children." By what is revealed, God creates and stimulates our trust. By what is unrevealed, He tests and braces

and approves it. When our trust stands the strain of all the great mysteries that are about us, God is glorified, and His honour is seen to have been linked with the very secrecy of His providence. The physician, or the commander of an army, or the head of a government imparts information from time to time, for the purpose of sustaining the faith of those to whom he is responsible in his own capacity. All curiosity implies more or less of scepticism and mental uneasiness. If our faith were unlimited, we should not seek to have so many questions answered. Imagine a physician whose fidelity and skill have inspired such confidence, that when he is called in, no one ever dreams of asking what treatment he is adopting or of surreptitiously checking his diagnosis; or a commander to whom his sovereign gives a free hand, without wishing him to divulge his plan of campaign; or a cabinet minister who has so far won the faith of all parties, that at some critical juncture in the national life the most relentless critics never think of cross-examining him at question time. Such men would have reached the highest accessible pinnacle of honour. The man is not yet born who commands that kind of unlimited confidence. To be trusted in silence and mystery and reservation is an honour not yet won by the best of us. But God demands and deserves this matchless honour. He ordains not a few of the mysteries that confront us, so that we may possess occasions for glorifying Him after this high fashion.

It is said that when Michel Angelo had become blind and decrepit with age, he was led morning by morning into the museum of the Vatican, so that he might delight his artistic sense by passing his hand over the wonderful lines of the Torso. It was this deprivation of sight that possibly brought some lowly citizen into touch with the master-hand, whose cunning had put the stamp of a priceless value on many a canvas and marble. A great many problems are unexplained, so that God may come into closer touch with us and be our guide in the solemn darkness. We grope, as He helps and sustains us, at the outline of wonderful mysteries that lie about us. Here is the Infinite who guides the finite, and yet He feels more honoured by the fact that we hang upon His help than the lowly Roman by the touch of the great artist's trembling hand. "It is the glory of God to conceal a thing," because by the very shadows in which He hides it we are cast with a more pathetic dependence upon His sympathy and care, and come into truer and more childlike contact with His Spirit.

God conceals many things, so that He *may protect us from*

needless pain and fear and magnify His own gentleness. It is part of our education that we should suffer, but suffering never exceeds the necessary and appointed limits. In the impenetrable mystery that confronts us, God may sometimes be hiding away a sorrow the burden of which would crush our tender and undisciplined hearts, for at our best we are only babes at God's feet. Many a thing must be hidden from a child, and the more sensitive he is the stricter must be the concealment. We are so timid and tender and unschooled, that God has often to place the shadow of His hand across our vision, just as the Alpine guide will blind-fold a nervous traveller so that he may guide him unharmed across some terrific chasm. Away in the interior of China, I once climbed a precipice that was almost perpendicular, if indeed it did not overhang. Steps had been cut out for the feet in the sandstone, and stout iron chains had been pinned within a few inches of the steps to afford support to the hands. My face was turned towards the rock as I went up, and I never thought of the gulf that yawned beneath. When I came to descend, I found I could not accomplish it with my face turned towards empty space and my eye looking down into the dim abyss, and with no solid object in the field of view. I was mastered by an inveterate dizziness and should have dropped, but for the timely assistance of a friend. I had to shut out the thought of the terrible abyss by turning my face to the rock, whilst my friend preceded me in the descent and guided my feet into the successive stepping-places. Many of God's mysteries are things that He has hidden from us to the glory of His pity and gentleness. He has to guide us over a great many of the perilous places of life in blindness. It would be death if the veil were taken away. He has to bring us down a great many fearsome descents with our face to the dead rock. If we could take in the whole position we should be overwhelmed. Do not think you are strong enough to peer undismayed into all the deep mysteries of eternity. God has hidden much from you in tender care for your peace and well-being, and to magnify His own gentleness. "It is the glory of God to conceal a thing."

God conceals some things from us to *excite us to nobler and more strenuous endeavour in our search after the truth.*

There are mysteries that are meant to be mysteries of the passing hour only, and that will pass away just as soon as all our best faculties have been brought into play by the search they have incited. An accomplished writer, who oscillated for half his life between doubt and faith, once said, "If the Almighty stood before me, and

in one hand held all truth, clear, defined, and infallibly formulated, and in the other hand held the right and privilege and opportunity of searching out the truth for myself, and asked me to make the choice, I would choose the effort of finding out for myself, rather than the mere satisfaction of possessing it." He thought, and that rightly, that he could reach the highest levels of faith and character open to him by strenuous personal struggle, and by that alone. There was sound philosophy in that. If our religious views could be poured into us by automatic processes that needed no co-operation on our part, they would have no educating value. There are some truths that we must know at once, for they are necessary to our very life. Those are the truths that are the subject of common revelation. On the other hand, amongst the things that are not revealed there may be truths that we shall come to know through our own thought and struggle and deepening spirituality of life, temporary mysteries that it is best for us to know through conflict, experience, sustained contemplation. Some of the grandest qualities portrayed for us in history have been developed by the endeavour to unlock the secrets and mysteries of earth. Think of the courage, enterprise, and endurance of such men as Columbus, Sir Hugh Willoughby, Sir Richard Grenville, Sir John Franklin, Mungo Park, Dr. Livingstone. Some of the purest heroisms with which human history glitters have been evolved in these bloodless battles with storm and icepack and tropical fever and moving masses of savage life. And shall not the struggle to unlock heaven's secrets evolve qualities upon a higher scale of magnificence than the struggle to unlock earth's secrets? The thought and faith and sacrifice called forth in the endeavour to search into the deep things of God ennoble us and reflect endless honour upon Him whose image we bear.

God hides many things from the world, so that *He may have secrets with the custody of which He can honour His own chosen servants*. The greatest proof that a sovereign can give of his favour to a subject is to entrust that subject with some high State secret. "It is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given." God withholds many things from the common knowledge, so that He may entrust them to those in whom He delights. If revelation were universal and unreserved, God would have no subjects of confidence with which to mark His love for those whom He deigns to call "friends." "Shall I hide from Abraham the thing that I do?" "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him, and He will show them

His covenant." The things that are open to the understanding of God's servants are often veiled from those who have "no fear of God before their eyes." For the disciples there is an uplifting of much of the mystery that gathered about their Master's person and glory. "Lord, how is it that Thou wilt manifest Thyself to us, and not unto the world?" The answer is that they love, and love is the foundation of a fellowship to which the world must be ever strange. If every deep thing were fathomed by the man who is self-exiled from God, the special privilege of those who live in close friendship with God would be lost. An unlimited revelation that took no account of character would leave God a bankrupt God, lacking the wherewithal to recompense His own chosen and faithful worshippers. His people are honoured by admission to His deep and hidden counsels, and in their honour He Himself is exalted. "It is the glory of God to conceal a thing."

God conceals some things from us, so that He may impress us with *the solemnities of the unknown*. Macaulay says that the difference between the poetry of Dante and that of Milton is that the one gives "exact details," and the other "dim intimations." "The value of Milton's images depends less on what they directly represent than on what they suggest." God's mysteries are very much like that. Some things can be better realized through plastic imagination than through rigid reason. Reason is too slow and cold and fragmentary in its methods to produce effects commensurate with the character of the subjects on which it works. The imagination must come in and produce its swift and portentous impressions. God leaves some problems dim to the understanding, to bring into play those higher and more creative faculties of the soul that see the things of God in a wide perspective, impossible to the reason.

God never conceals what may be necessary to furnish His people for the work and service of life. He has revealed enough of His being and of His purpose to justify His claim upon our love and loyalty and faith. And yet, interwoven with the texture of the revelation itself, there is an element of mystery to prove and humble and solemnise. I shall not soon forget a visit I once paid in the dead of night to the Colosseum. The moon was just rising behind the gigantic walls. Its light was almost golden in depth and richness. The towering battlements cast shadows dense as a thundercloud. The vast circle of masonry was all but filled with gloom and darkness. By-and-by the light of the rising moon fell in quivering bars through the rents in the walls and the doorways

in the galleries. At last the whole place looked like a colossal wheel with spokes of burnished metal divided off from each other by intervals of ebony. In that vast, fan-like figure, quivering light and unbroken shadow, cast by the piles of masonry, lay side by side with each other with an alternation that was almost mathematical. Was not that a figure of the universe? Dazzling light and impenetrable shadow, clear revelation and dim mystery, the comprehensible and the incomprehensible things of God's love lie side by side with each other, throughout the whole of the wonderful circle. "We know in part, and we prophesy in part." Never forget either the revelation or the mysteries that are linked with it. Let the revelation inspire your faith, and let the mystery awaken your awe. "The secret things belong unto the Lord our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law."

IV.

THE PROVIDENCE OF THE UNKNOWN.

“ I girded thee, though thou hast not known Me.”—*Isa.* xlv. 5.

THESE words are a prophetic declaration to Cyrus, king of Persia, who conquered Babylon and set free the Jews held captive there. The words announce that Cyrus was directed, equipped, and prospered by God, though he was not as yet one of God's enlightened worshippers.

Idolatry in its grosser forms was unknown in Persia. The religion of Persia recognised one God, beneficent in character and work and purpose, revealed under the symbol of light. This one God, however, was not clothed with infinite attributes. His dominion was limited by the existence and activity of a rival spirit of evil, equally great and unbegotten with himself. It was in this imperfect faith that the great and noble Cyrus was trained. Till after his contact with the Jews, he did not know God in His essential nature as spirit without symbol, supreme in His sovereignty, and infinite in the attributes that clothed Him. And yet in his temper there was a ready answerableness to the unseen touch of God's hand, an unconscious obedience to sacred purposes he but dimly discerned, and a providential sanctification for the fulfilment of God's counsels, in spite of his imperfect conceptions of God. Ignorance that is inseparable from the circumstances in which men are cradled, ignorance that is entirely involuntary, does not disqualify men from being the instruments of God's will, and receiving some of the most lustrous honours dispensed by His hand. I do not wish to under-estimate the worth and importance of knowledge. Christ came, and Providence works to give us the knowledge of God ; and there can be no eternal life without some form or degree of it. But between a high and enlightened faith in God on the one hand, and brutish ignorance and perversity on the other, there is a

wide margin of defective and imperfect knowledge, within which God is ever working by elect and appointed instruments. God's work through men does not cease at the point at which their knowledge ceases. Equipment for God's work and purpose is often unconscious still,—unconscious sometimes because of the limits to the range of knowledge that God Himself has established,—unconscious sometimes because of our own slowness to see God and to trace His ways. "I girded thee, though thou hast not known Me."

Cyrus was God's elect agent for the second emancipation of His people from bondage, as Moses was the elect agent in their first emancipation. To some of us these verses in Isaiah will suggest a comparison between the character of the call and qualification received by the two respective agents. When God was about to use Moses for the redemption of His people from the hand of Pharaoh, He appeared to him in the burning bush, and made a new revelation of His essential nature, "I AM THAT I AM," the basis of his appointment. That new revelation, as handed down by Moses, became the creed of the ransomed Church and the foundation of its subsequent beliefs. Moses was equipped for his work by a new and a distinctive revelation. Cyrus was apostrophised only in the pages of an obscure Hebrew prophet, and knew neither the destiny for which he was being made ready, nor the mysterious Being who shaped to each other the man and his appointed work. He had a Divine vocation amongst the nations of the East, but he knew not whence that vocation came, nor to what high ends it tended. There was the voice without the manifesting fire. No gleam of the glory of the great Being who called him visited his spirit. An unknown God girded.

And these instances are typical. The world has in it men who receive a vocation from a God they in part know and acknowledge, and men who receive just as genuine a vocation from God, but because of some disability in their birth and environment, or because of some inaptitude of the reason, God remains to them an unknown God. Atoms and planets and constellations obey a God they cannot know. This is true of those sub-human creatures that were not made in the image of God. Much of the life around us can never know God, and yet God equips it for His service, and breathes power into its function, and makes it radiant with His favour. God's word is unfailingly fulfilled. And some of the infantile stages of human life and progress illustrate this same unconscious and inarticulate loyalty to Divine plans, this

accomplishment of a half-enlightened service that is nevertheless acceptable to God. The worth of our several ministries cannot always be tested by the degree of knowledge that informs them. Some men, like the bees, do much of their work in the sunshine. They fulfil the tasks of life in the light of a clear illumination. For them the knowledge of God always precedes a vocation from God. There are men also who are like the coral insect, which works a fathom or two below the surface of the sea, and dies when the reef upon which it has laboured is just beginning to tower into the sunlight. Some men obey a sense of duty ; and when the manifestation of God's fuller knowledge seems about to break upon them, they pass away. Amidst the darkness of semi-heathenisms, and amidst the lingering shadows of imperfect Christian knowledge, vocations from God are both vouchsafed and fulfilled. For the enlightened Moses and for the half-enlightened Cyrus alike there is the high trust of a mission from the Most High, and the same Providence to watch over the successive steps of that mission. And herein lies the characteristic distinction between inspiration and providential equipment. Providential equipment consists in being girded by a God who may be more or less unknown. Inspiration implies that God's chosen agent has all his faculties filled with God's presence as He girds.

I. Is it not a reasonable and a consistent thought, that the providential equipment, vocation, and sovereignty in a man's life should transcend his knowledge of God and God's purpose ? God clothes men with a panoply that is not always the panoply of the inspired truth and the written word. His agents are not infrequently more or less blindfolded as they receive His girding.

1. God may sometimes use a man who seems half a heathen, to remind His people that His providential sovereignty is larger than all finite thought. If we deny that He ever does this, we make our own knowledge a limit of possibility to the processes of His all-shaping and all-ruling providence. Theology is the grandest of all the sciences ; but we must never suppose that the Divine feet move only along the tracks of its definitions. The creature's thought of God must not be taken as a scale by which to measure God's thought of the creature. To what an inappreciable fraction should we reduce God's providence by a theory of that sort ! The boundless circumference of God's active power can never be brought within the little focus of man's intellectual vision.

In the early days of the British rule in India, the old Mogul at Delhi, and the mediatised native sovereigns in other cities, were

allowed independent rights within their own palace precincts. The British rule did not intrude there. Now and again half-clad slave girls and palace dependants, in terror for their lives, and wretches waled and trembling with recent chastisements, would escape the palace precincts and seek protection under the humane governments that had been planted in the surrounding cities. These spacious palaces were like little islands of the old despotisms, cruelties, and oppressions bristling above the tide of constitutional right and privilege and liberty that was rising far and near. In God's empire there are no spots of organized diabolism of that sort, that are separated from the control, direction, and over-rule of providential law. Alas ! it is only too easy to find signs of individual and collective resistance to God's law ; but there are no indrawn spheres or reservations, dominated by pagan ignorance, from which His power, sovereignty, and prerogative are shut out. He rules where He is not worshipped, directs where He is not recognised, girds where He is not known.

2. In going beyond the circle of the elect nation to choose an instrument for the fulfilment of His counsels, God seems to remind us that the motive of His providential activity is altogether Divine. He uses the imperfectly taught Gentile, and puts upon him honour that might seem to belong to the Jew, to illustrate the sovereignty of His grace. The dignities connected with the accomplishment of His work are of His free gift, and not matter of claim on our part, or barter, or commercial exchange.

His redemptive activities do not rest upon the vaunted basis of our knowledge and worship. Those activities rather constitute the beginning of our knowledge, and the motive of our worship. His guiding and protecting mercies overpass the limits within which He is consciously recognised and intelligently served, to show that those mercies are the fruit of His own free, upspringing tenderness, rather than the reward of knowledge and reverence in His worshippers. After all, the knowledge of God possessed by Moses and Isaiah and Daniel and Nehemiah did not so distinguish them from Cyrus as to make them alone worthy of Divine guidance and help and benediction, and leave the devout and virtuous pagans, of whom Cyrus was the type, outside the range of providential favour and direction. In the depths of the ocean there are creatures with specialized organs of sight that are of very little service to them ; and there are creatures without specialized organs of sight that seem to be more or less sensible to the presence of light. It might sometimes happen that the Jew, with his special-

ized revelation of Divine things, had not a more vivid sense of God's practical help and favour and leading than the reverent and right-loving Persian, who had no such specialized revelation. God sometimes wrought beyond the line that separated the chosen nationality from the rest of the world, to show that, after all, the motive and mainspring of His working was not any special virtue or qualification or endowment of knowledge in the elect people themselves, but "for His own name's sake,"—that pure, undistinguishing love of which the covenant names and relations were the formal seals. The Providence clothing and encircling Cyrus was to be a foundation for his clearer knowledge of God by-and-by. No antecedent knowledge existed to constitute a theological merit demanding the display of God's beneficent providence. There is a prevenient providence no less than a prevenient grace, for providence, after all, is but grace working in the external circumstances of our lives. Equipment, defence, gracious over-rule, are not items of privilege entering into our lives only in exchange for the intelligent appreciation we show of God's being, or the worship we render before the vision of His majesty. They come freely to all obedient and receptive wills, and to all ready and docile instruments for God's service.

If it is when the sun is in eclipse that the astronomer is able to see the fountains of glowing hydrogen that rise out of the inner substance of the sun and project their splendour for thousands and tens of thousands of miles beyond its surface. The strange and superb spectacle is visible only on the margin that lies between the incandescent body and the sphere of less luminous space that surrounds it. And so there are sublime illustrations of God's providential love and care that can be most nobly seen in contrast with pagan darkness. The name of this humane and truth-seeking king, on the border-line between the elect people and outside heathendom, is identified with a manifestation of tender grace and beneficent favour and help more beautiful and suggestive perhaps than some of the manifestations that occur amidst the scenes of light and revelation. God works in the region that lies beyond the sphere of clear, conscious knowledge, outside the Shechinah-lit tabernacle and the community of its worshippers, to show that all providence has its motive and mainspring in His own heart of ungrudging love. "I girded thee, though thou hast not known Me."

3. Partial ignorance of God may be an appointed condition for the test and development of faith. It is not only the virtuous

heathen who is girded by an unrecognised hand and made the agent in providential plans and purposes he cannot fathom. The distinction between Isaiah and Cyrus, between Cyrus and ourselves, is one of degree. The revelation that comes, even to Moses, is not absolute and exhaustive. That revelation leaves many a sphere of darkness between God and Moses untouched. For his work here, and for his triumph hereafter, Moses was equipped amidst veiling clouds. He could not see the face of God. And we of the more perfect dispensation know only in part, and a very small and elementary part it is. We cannot visualise our conception of God's being and personality. That is forbidden by the commandment against image making. The spirit of that commandment condemns the picture wrought within the brain no less than the form fashioned by the hands. We have only a logical conception of God's personality, and sometimes we are not very sure of that. The Divine character, in many of its aspects, is still an unconquered problem to us. There are mysteries in the Divine nature that stagger language. On its intellectual side, at least, our religious knowledge is still imperfect, fragmentary, hesitating. God suffers it to be so, possibly that we may be the better disciplined in that humility which is the basis of faith. Fuller knowledge vouchsafed to us through intellectual channels only might make us arrogant sciolists, incapable of faith. Whilst our natures are checked and humiliated and depressed on the intellectual side, they grow in acute sensibility on that emotional side through which the highest faith is quickened. And to bring about this end, God may see fit to hide Himself from us. He may find it needful to keep us in a semi-darkened world, wandering through the twilight of imperfect knowledge, so that faith may cling to Him the more closely. We could never learn the lesson of trust in a world that was one unbroken blaze of knowledge. The faith of the affections sometimes unfolds itself with exquisite beauty when the shadows of a half-lit summer midnight lie about the proud reason. If with this proneness to an evil self-sufficiency within us we knew as much about God as an archangel, we should never bow ourselves to the girding of God's strong hand.

I have sometimes thought that so long as heathen darkness does not involve a gross and demoralizing misrepresentation of God, but only a partial privation of knowledge, it offers the occasion for the exercise of a higher faith than that which is possible amidst the breaking twilights of Christian knowledge. The devout and pure-minded pagan, like Cyrus, who trusts his moral instincts

without any adequate knowledge of their Divine origin, who with touching fidelity follows an unsyllabled vocation from heavens that have not yet opened themselves in revelation and definite testimony, who accepts an equipment from a Hand that has touched and guided him out of the darkness, is perhaps a more splendid example of faith than the man who manifests the same trust and loyalty and obedience in the midst of clearer intellectual conceptions of God. The puzzle of the long pagan centuries is not so painful and oppressive if we look at it from this standpoint. Faith, like the fern, may grow into richer grace and more luxurious form, if planted in the shadow and damped by the sunless mists. If we can think that partial darkness may be the call and condition for the exercise of higher faith, the imperfection of our knowledge of God will be less of a stumbling-block than it may have been heretofore. The vocation in our lives, and the Providence over-arching the steps by which we fulfil that vocation, transcend our knowledge. God does not hang the length and breadth of the wonderful web He is weaving upon the little definitions of His nature, attributes, and government that we have set up within these narrow brains. "I girded thee."

II. Examples of this providential girding by an unknown God will readily occur to us that seem to conform to the type represented by Cyrus.

1. If we think of the men, the tradition of whose teaching and example is intertwined with all that is highest and best in the life of the nations outside the range of Christendom, we shall see that these men have been girded for their moral conquests and guided to their ascendancies over their fellow men by the same unrecognised Hand that guided and girded this elect Persian. It is perhaps impossible to recall the name of a great and permanently honoured teacher in the past history of India, China, Persia, Egypt, Greece, or Rome, whose influence rested upon an immoral doctrine or a contradiction of conscience. There must have been such leaders in the insignificant races that relapsed into cannibalism, scalp-hunting, and animal debasement. But no such names appear in the histories of the great civilized empires. Confucius was the instrument for keeping alive in China a morality that was almost as pure as the morality of the decalogue. He stamped out all traces of Moloch worship. He can be quoted with commanding effect against many of the cruelties and superstitions of the present day. Gautama Buddha taught a morality equally pure, and so emphasised the demerit of sin as to make his teaching the best

available basis that can be found for the evangelical doctrine of the atonement. The well-considered and dispassionate and reverent scepticism of Socrates acted as a solvent of Greek superstition, and prepared the way for the thoughtful Christianity of Alexandria. Mahomet gave form and force to a system which, in spite of its excesses and fanaticisms, has been a useful protest against idolatry, and has gathered together into a simple civilization and worship tribes that would otherwise have been incurably degraded by fetich worship. Now are we to suppose that it was without any supreme direction or control, that these famous teachers conspired together to support these high theories of life and conduct? Did these great pieces on the chessboard of the nations tumble blindly on to these particular squares where they have been elements of such momentous importance, without the guiding authority of an unseen Hand? If these great guides and instructors of mankind, in enunciating the principles associated with their names, freed their fellow men from the grosser forms of superstition and error: if they helped to guard the national tradition pure from the taint of lust and blood; if they kept alive reverence for morality and the unknown God; if by their precept and example they conserved elements that facilitate the building up of the universal Church and kingdom of Christ,—although they knew not God, they were yet surely under His direction and control. They belonged to the same high category as Cyrus. They were not prophets, because they had not the light which brought into view the mysterious Person who guided, equipped, and succoured them. But they were providential instruments, instruments that in spite of their defective discernments, were plastic to God's controlling purpose. They represent an elect remnant amongst the reprobate Gentiles. The word is no less true to them than to the emancipator of the ancient Jews, "I girded thee, though thou hast not known Me."

2. We must not judge the issues of the social and political movements of the present and past times by the measure of Divine knowledge they exhibit. Some of these movements, however little they seem to recognise God, are empowered by His mysterious hand, and minister to the accomplishment of His secret purpose. The dark despotisms enthroned over the ancient world annealed men into stable communities. The Greek and Roman civilizations, whilst more than half blind to the true nature of God, fulfilled providential functions to the race. The old monasticisms, with their perverted conceptions of the Divine character, sheltered learning, brought waste lands under cultivation, cradled the spirit

of scientific invention. The French Revolution, with all its sad veins of atheism, sheds blessing on us to-day. It opened a happier era for the whole of Europe. It did not know God, but its march was guided and its goal fixed by His unseen hand. The wars of the present century, originating not unfrequently in the pride and ill-humour of kings and statesmen, have tended to break down the barriers of archaic prejudice and widen the bounds of religious toleration. And there are doubtless providential issues of the highest value in the democratic movements that are agitating Europe to-day, however reluctant those movements may be to recognise God. We are accustomed to speak of them as anti-christian, but the Church may sometimes happen to be less Christian than the movements on which we look down with pharisaic disdain. Did Christ smile on colossal accumulations of property, and pronounce benedictions over the rich and the full, that we should call movements antichristian, the first motive of which is to champion, in however mistaken a fashion, the cause of the poor, and to protest against the concentration of the nation's wealth in the hands of men who are callous to their vast responsibilities? There is a broad line of distinction between Christ and the socialist. But the line of distinction between Christ and the selfish plutocrat is broader still. The socialist makes the community the final and absolute proprietor of all wealth : Jesus Christ makes God the proprietor, and us His stewards for others. The socialist seeks to enforce his doctrine of property by brute force : Jesus Christ, by the moral leaven of love in the soul of a man. Did Jesus Christ teach caste and uphold hereditary, and unequal privilege, and lift up His voice for the reigning hierarchies, that men who make "liberty, equality, and fraternity" their watchword should be spoken of as though they were children of the devil? Is it not a significant thing that almost all the democratic movements of the day are opposed to war? Are they not more closely in accord with the spirit of Christ than the hectoring and bloodguilty princelings who have found their way into saints' calendars, and for whose honour churches have been built? If we study the inner history of some of the anarchic movements of the continent, we shall find that their representatives are often inspired with a temper of sweet humanity, a perfervid heroism, a self-sacrificing generosity that might justly cause some of us to blush. And these movements are associated with the denial of God, or at least of the State God. Now can we suppose that this tender compassion, this fortitude in suffering, this fidelity to the

cause of the poor and the needy, is not to effect some Divine and beneficent purpose at last? God girds still where He is not known. No graver impeachment of violence can be directed against these movements than might have been directed against the march of Cyrus, and that was providential.

3. Does not the fact that the theology of the modern scientist is sometimes very dim and defective tempt us to deny the Divine authority of his vocation and to discredit the providential issue in the special work he is called to do? Some of the schools of research and experiment and invention to which we are most deeply indebted are indifferent and even hostile to the claims of religion. And yet God calls the man of science to his work, vouchsafes the needful equipment for success, and guides all the far-off issues to which that work may tend. We must never look upon the present-day science, however slow it may be to confess God, as an isolated and uncontrolled diabolism beyond the reach of God's hand. Whatever deserts it may skirt or cross in its mysterious progress, its conquests come by a Divine decree. In facilitating the intercourse between nations, and fostering that brotherhood which is the ripest fruit of such intercourse; in marshalling for man's service forces which relieve him of degrading toil; in diminishing the sum of human pain by its unostentatious processes; in giving man's nature new power in almost every direction,—is it not working out the redemption of God's people from some of the evil captivities that enthrall them? It may be said, "Many of its teachings are antagonistic to the Bible." Its larger generalizations are so unfixed at present, it is difficult to say what form they may ultimately come to take. You say, "It denies a conscious and intelligent First Cause, or at least robs that Cause of the attributes which seem to make worship and communion possible." On these questions it may not yet know its own mind. But do not its practical achievements seem to be in harmony with what God has planned? Did He not heal when manifested in Jesus Christ? and does not science inherit that high and distinguished vocation? Jesus was the Healer who knew His own anointing: science is a healer that has been anointed in its dreams, and knows it not. Jesus was the Prophet who knew all things: science is the blind instrument only, but an instrument that is elect and providential. It is doing God's work and moving towards God's ends. However dark the shadows of its temporary agnosticisms, its vocation and its destiny are alike Divine.

4. And all this is true for ourselves. The knowledge possessed

by those of us who know God best is, after all, infinitesimal in amount and degree. It is nothing in comparison with what remains to be known. We are often oppressed by our own limited views of God. It seems we can scarcely be the true servants of God and doing Divine work unless we have broader and brighter and more penetrating views of God's nature. We are crushed by the inevitable secularisms of our life, and cannot believe that we are breathing the sacred atmosphere that encircles God's priests and kings. We have not always the sensible assurance that our vocation is from God. Our hearts writhe again as we discern how faulty and broken and vacillating is our apprehension of the Divine presence. We cannot adequately picture the Eternal to our minds. It seems at times as though God, and providence, and supernatural vocation, and the high sanctions under which we seek to bring ourselves, were dreams. We are haunted by the thought that there is some subtle curse of ineradicable atheism cleaving to our inmost souls. Let us keep in our hearts a quick and obedient answerableness to the Divine touch and leading. In spite of the limit in our vision and the miserable failure in the spirit of our service, He is guiding us to beneficent conquests, and strengthening us to achieve holy emancipations, and fitting us for eternal honours. He was making us ready for service of some sort, when we knew far less about Him than we know to-day. In the most thoughtless periods of our life there were providential educations and equipments and enswathements of power for future service. And it is so still. Much as God may be hidden from us, limited as may be our apprehension of His vast power, sad mixture of heathenism and unbelief as that inward life upon which God looks may be, He is with us so long as we are sincere in our wish to serve Him. His providence directs the steps of our pilgrimage. His power clothes us in unseen ways for our appointed work. His love shall crown our struggle with brilliant victory. He girds, though He is not fully seen.

And even after God seems to have been revealed to us in the person of Jesus Christ, how often do we find God becoming a hidden and an unknown God to us in His providential relations ! He is ever presenting Himself in new aspects of mystery here, although He may be still shining upon us in the face of His Son. We are constrained to say with Job, "Behold, I go forward, but He is not there ; and backward, but I cannot perceive Him : on the left hand, where He doth work, but I cannot behold Him : He hideth Himself on the right hand, that I cannot see Him." The

stern, invisible destiny that shapes the outward incidents of our life seems so unlike the good Father spoken of by Jesus Christ, whose gentle hand clothes the lilies with their grace and feeds the ravens from His garner. At times it may seem rather as though some malignant demon were presiding over our lives, or at least sharing the sovereignty. The steps by which we are directed are strange and dark and jagged with torment, and the high goal to which they may possibly be tending is shrouded from our view ; heavens clothed in sackcloth and inscrutable and abiding depression when we have sought only the joy of God ! an overflowing cup of gall, to be drained to the dregs, when there is no one to in view on whose behalf it is to be drunk, and the drinking seems purely gratuitous ! Strange God with whom we are dealing, as little comprehended by us in some of His relations as by Cyrus ! But beyond the widest bound of our faith and knowledge there is providential guiding and girding and victory.

And these words seem to suggest solemn comfort to us in view of the final conflict to which we shall all one day be brought. We shall enter the world to come as conquerors, girded for our triumph by an unseen Hand. The spirit-world repels us by its icy strangeness and mystery. In His relation to the spirit-world God is less clearly known than in His relation to our present life. We fancy sometimes we should not have the same fears if He were to deal with us there as here, from behind the veil of sense. The sharp edge is taken away from our terror when we are dealt with through an intermediate system of nature. The world of spirits is an untraversed void. God in His relation to the realms of disembodied life is a conception we but partially realize, a conception pregnant with not a little dread to some of us. Well, what a consoling reflection it is, that our equipment is not determined by the measure of our knowledge ! In ways hidden from us God prepares us for the unseen and the unknown. If we are only obedient to our vocation, however dim and undefined that vocation may seem ; if we are dutiful and docile to the voiceless love that is about our path to lead us ; if we move step by step as He secretly impels us, though we see Him not ; if we trust ourselves to His equipment in everything that comes to us with the claim and the sacredness of duty in it,—the dark, unknown spheres into which He leads us shall prove spheres full of the lights and the shoutings and the flowers that will bespeak our victory and the victory of our fellows. He girds, though we know Him not.

God's elect servants sometimes die too, in circumstances that

make thoughts of God impossible. Perhaps they are snatched away by unexpected accident. They leave life in a struggle that petrifies thought and feeling. In the moment when God is most needed, and when they would gladly have brought every power to the contemplation of Him, their minds are just as blank of sublime and inspiring views of Divine things as though they had been untaught heathen. The mirror of the pure mind is dimmed by death, and no worthy reflection of God can be traced there. In the very crisis of the last conflict God seems to be least known. The brain has lost its power to act. The sublime theologies have dissolved. The heart's processes of desire and affection subside into stupor. The will can no longer take hold on the old covenant promises and their consolations. In that solemn hour of darkness and humiliation and mental inaptitude, God, unknown and unrecognised, girds for the victory still. The interpretation of the solemn riddle seems to be, "Not by might" of wisdom, "nor by power" of understanding in the knowledge of God, "but by the Spirit of My grace, saith the Lord."

Let us not forget that, though the girding is often in darkness, the motive of this girding in shadows is the inbringing of the perfect light. We must not under-estimate the value of Divine knowledge. God can work without it sometimes, but even then the veiling is only for a season, that we may come to Him at length with more perfect discernment. Darkness can never be a final motive of God's dispensations. "I girded thee"; "that they may know from the rising of the sun, and from the west, that there is none beside Me." Although God takes men up in their ignorance, and gives them missions to fulfil before the ignorance has quite dissolved away, He does not leave them there. The accomplished mission heralds the clearer dawn.

Let us bear in mind that the chasm that separates the Christian from the pagan world, the believer from the agnostic, is not so wide as it is sometimes fancied. It is not so wide as to annul vocation and responsibility for the ignorant and the unbelieving. Obedience and disobedience are possible to Moses and Cyrus, to Daniel and Nebuchadnezzar alike. Where God is not consciously known, if the ignorance at least does not spring from wilful contempt of God, there is fitness for virtue and duty. Cyrus, with an ill-defined and uninterpreted vocation, was obedient to the heavenly call. Pharaoh, Baalam, the unfaithful prophet at Bethel, Judas Iscariot, visited with supernatural light, were disobedient to it. They resisted the counsel of God, and perished. Never put equip-

ment and providential ordination in place of practical loyalty to the duties of your life. Whatever the measure of our knowledge, we are all girded in God's strength for some triumph. Let us go on in God's strength, doing the work of each successive day as He helps us, and we shall stand at last among His crowned and anointed kings.

V.

DAYS PRING MERCIES.

“They are new every morning.”—*Lam.* iii. 23.

IT is almost startling to find this tender and inspiring utterance embedded in the very heart of a book of lamentations. This assurance that the Divine mercies are unfailing in their gracious and patient succession shines like a clear-cut star out of the black desolations portrayed in the adjacent chapters. We feel ourselves perplexed by this jubilant interjection in the midst of the tempest of tears and wailing and wormwood. It is not what we expect. The hurricane that has been haunting all hearts with the frenzy of its unceasing roar lulls itself for a moment to listen to the low-ringing, fearless prattle of a child. The wreaths of smoke that rise from sacked and smouldering homes and from crackling cities part as some passing breeze stirs the air, and the calm, lustrous azure of the firmament peeps out again. The shrieks that break from a thousand homes of death, and rend the awful midnight, grow still for a while ; and in the mysterious pause a nightingale begins to pour out its stream of dainty melody. The chapter opens with a monologue pitched in a minor of utter piteousness. The prophet is speaking as the representative of his stricken country. “I am the man that hath seen affliction by the rod of His wrath” ; “He hath led me, and brought me into darkness, but not into light.” And then, after having touched every possible chord of sorrow, the monologue of lamentation suddenly ends. But almost before its last note has died the chorus of calm thanksgiving breaks forth and throbs its way skyward. “It is of the Lord’s mercies that we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning.”

I. These words seem to speak of *the inexhaustible wealth of*

God's forgiveness. But for the daily renewal of God's mercy to His people, they would have been utterly cut off. God's anger would not have stopped at the desolation of their cities, and their subjection to an alien power. It was by the exercise of the Divine compassion alone that they had been kept from clean extermination. Not only was this power shown forth in the ultimate restoration of the waste cities, but in the very preservation of the chosen people in the midst of their chastisements. God's mercies were renewed to them every morning. His faithfulness to the covenant was great beyond all human parallel. No new day could ever brighten and glow over the cowed, comfortless, half-relenting remnant of the holy seed, but for God's readiness to forgive. The life of to-day was the sign that God had not finally ratified the condemnation invited by the sin of yesterday. New hopes and promises shone with every breaking dawn. The covenant had been annulled a thousand times by the people's sin, but fresh outflows of Divine love still placed the covenant blessings within their reach. God, of His unceasing grace, still maintained that obligation to the covenant engagements from which He had been virtually freed by the faithlessness of His people. They had sinned away their covenant birthright, but God's compassion hovered near to restore it again.

And is it not ever thus with God's people? In times of chastisement and in times of prosperity alike, they need to be ever encircled by God's forgiving grace. Alas ! with many of us every day has its acts of shortcoming, if not of conscious transgression, and God's pardoning love must needs go before us in new forms of manifestation. Were not His mercy ever new, because it springs fresh from the sacred abysses and mysteries of His own pitiful nature, it would be forced into new channels of forgiveness by our reiterated sin. Our sin raises such new and unlooked-for barriers between ourselves and God ; we weave around ourselves such a network of worldly influences and passions and prejudices ; we so shut ourselves in, by pride and self-trust and corrupt wilfulness, from the quiet waters and sunbathed meadows where God's love breathes its peace,—that His mercy has to find us out by new routes and untraversed avenues of communication. In thought, desire, and habitual temper of soul, we wander so far from God that His grace has to follow and find us anew, as heroic and enterprising travellers go to hunt up their lost predecessors in the field. But this search is not a search of years. His mercy ever finds us by the dawn. Whatever the failures of yesterday and the possible

shortcomings of to-day, His mercy stands before us at our waking to start us afresh in the sunshine.

I once visited the ruins of a noble city that had been built on a desert oasis. Mighty columns of roofless temples still stood in unbroken file. Halls in which kings and satraps had feasted two thousand years ago were represented by solitary walls. Gateways of richly carven stone led to a paradise of bats and owls. All was ruin. But past the dismantled city, brooks, which had once flowed through gorgeous flower gardens and at the foot of marble halls, still swept on in undying music and unwasted freshness. The waters were just as sweet as when queens quaffed them two thousand years ago. A few hours before they had been melted from the snows of the distant mountains. And so God's forgiving love flows in ever-renewed form through the wreck of the past. Past vows and past covenants and noble purposes may be represented by solitary columns and broken arches and scattered foundations that are crumbling into dust, yet through the scene of ruin fresh grace is ever flowing from His great heart on high.

And when there is no fresh wandering to be forgiven, God's new mercy awaits us at the dawn to refresh our joy and invigorate our strength, and to give to us the power of a new and sinless consecration. The highest life of heaven is not crystallized into immobility. "The Lamb leads to living fountains." There is surely freshness there. And the highest Christian life of earth needs the dew of a daily baptism, so that it may maintain its vigour and bring forth its fruit. New manifestations attend upon God's people with every dawn, to fit them for the day. There is no blank day here, like the days that were without manna in the wilderness. There are no weeks or months of drought.

Close by one of the great cities of the East, there is a large stretch of grass that is always green. Sometimes the showers are rare and scanty, and the thermometer mounts to an appalling height, and one wonders to see the grass green and lush as though it were growing in some English meadow. It is kept so by a heavy dew, that never fails to fall in the night-time. And so with our life of consecration. There is no dawn without the dew of abounding love and compassion descending to keep it green. In our sleeping hours God's grace seems to silently store itself up for a more lavish effusion at the dawn. "His mercies are new every morning."

II. These words seem to suggest *the resourcefulness of Divine providence*. The mercy that is ever fresh to pardon is ever fresh to guide and shape the circumstances in the midst of which the

pardoned life is spent. The text is in direct conflict with the clock-work theory of the universe. There is no winding-up process, the virtue of which will absolve from direct control for a longer or shorter term of time. With the re-awakening of consciousness in those who are the objects of God's care every day dawn, Providence starts out on new courses of help and deliverance and controlling love. "Weeping may endure for the night," but God's gracious hand never forgets to make ready its surprise of joy for the morning. The setting sun sees God's people beleaguered by hostile legions, and with hearts sinking beneath the weight of perplexity and despair; but the path of providential leading has turned a sharp corner in the night, and the morrow's sun has risen upon a traversed sea, and the dreaded foe strewn like helpless wreck-drift along the shore. And even when there are no special difficulties awaiting the solution of God's providence, and our life is uneventful in its outward complexion, Providence is always versatile in its unseen methods and processes. We may sometimes seem to be left at the mercy of unalterable forces; no interposition; old natural laws that shaped the destiny of Adam shaping ours without any break, old events repeating themselves, all mechanism. Yet as bridges built in the time of the Conquest carry over their lines day by day new men with new thoughts to be accomplished in the world, these ever-repeating events are working by the line of an old order to new providential issues. Providence glories in freshness and originality; it abhors unintelligent routine. Our circumstances, changing as they sometimes do day by day, call for new adaptations of God's providential goodness. The motive of keeping us alive to the ever-new and ever-changing manifestations of God's providential goodness may not infrequently be the true key to the mystery of our changing circumstances and associations. The tied-up helm and the sail square-set to the wind are no types of His providential methods of dealing with us. Life is full of bends and rapids and shallows and whirlpools, and an automatic providence will not meet the terrific emergencies of its swiftly-passing moments. Sail and helm alike are in His hand, and answer to His touch through every flashing second. Not only do the new mercies of every day imply fresh acts of thought and love in God, but each breath, unconscious as it may be in us, is correlated to a conscious impulse of grace and tenderness in our great Father's heart. The providential love of the parent for the child is not always renewed day by day. The flesh could not stand such a strain on the emotional life. Steps are

taken and acts done, the effects of which must last for years. Decisions respecting the child's education and after-career are made, and an equipment for that career provided, that could not very well be repeated. The subject is then dismissed. Human nature could not bear the strain of such daily burdens. God's providential mercy, however, is renewed to us day by day. There is not some grand outburst of solicitude and preparation for our destiny, and then a long relaxation from the burdens of this anxious guardianship.

Astronomers at one time puzzled themselves over a problem in solar physics. How was the heat of the sun maintained? It seemed a natural inference that as it was always giving off heat in stupendous volumes, ultimate exhaustion must one day come. Within recent times the suggestion has found wide acceptance, that the sun is constantly drawing meteors and asteroids and comets to itself, and that the heat is maintained by the impact of these bodies, as they fall into the sun. Things come to us from time to time that seem out of all accord with the harmonies around us. Strange difficulties, stumbling-blocks, tribulations, start up in the path of our daily life. These things are drawn into the circle of God's control and government for their solution, and it is in this way that the very glory of God's providence is maintained.

III. These words seem to suggest *the unfailing truth and faithfulness of God* in His relation to His people. God's renewed mercies are linked with the morning, because the return of the day is one of the most perfect and intelligible symbols of constancy to be found in the economy of nature. The rains may come and go upon a system to which science has found no clue. Winter sometimes pushes itself far on into the spring. A late spring and an early autumn may squeeze out the summer. A flood may quite change the face of a country. Islands have been known to disappear in some of the convulsions of nature. The mariner has looked for his landmark, and it has gone. Empires may rise and perish, with no hope of a resurrection other than an ignoble disinterment at the hands of the archæologist. But no ill chance can befall the dayspring. What watchman from city wall ever looked for the morning in its appointed time, and it came not? And as infallibly as the welcome day-dawn steals at its own hour into our homes, so infallibly do the Divine compassions arise upon the lowly and the contrite. God reflects the benignity of His own face into the flush of dawn, and makes it the parable of a faithfulness

upon which you can always count. "His mercies are new every morning : great is Thy faithfulness." It is in the strength of this infinite faithfulness and truth that the renewed compassion is grounded. How unlike human love in many of its forms, which, once embittered by disappointment, changes into gall, cynicism, misanthropy ! There are not a few hearts from whose affection all elasticity has for ever gone. The affection is like a spring that has been rendered limp and useless through overstrain. A shrewd observer of human nature has said : "For a woman there is no second love. Her nature is too delicate to withstand a second time that most terrible shock and convulsion of soul. Think of Juliet. Could she have sustained a second time that overpowering bliss and horror?" Well, that statement is true, within certain limits, of both man and woman alike. The human love that is centred on human objects cannot renew itself for ever. It may be so crushed, that no dew or sunshine can lift it up again. Old people do not care to form new friendships. How transcendent the Divine love ! It has been grieved and crossed and contemned by our weaknesses, insincerities, rebellions, a thousand times ; and yet it renews itself unceasingly with every day-dawn. Century after century, and millennium after millennium, it has been slighted, and mocked, and spit upon, and trampled under foot by man in his untold generations ; and yet upon the evil and good, upon the just and unjust, it still shines anew with every new sun. God loves us in some way in all our moods. His strong nature can renew and maintain its compassions generation after generation ; and when the last earthly sun shall have set, and we shall have slept through the long watches that divide out the night of death, we shall find the same faithful mercy has renewed itself into more exquisite tenderness, and waits to greet us at our uprising from the tomb. "His mercies are new every morning : great is Thy faithfulness."

IV. These words suggest *the unfailing promptness* of God's ministrations. "His mercies are new every morning" ; that is, just as soon as, or even before, we begin to need them. We receive our salvation and guidance and defence, not of our own work, but of His free love. If it were of our own work, we must needs wait for the nightfall before we could receive any recompense. Wages are paid at sunset. But it is all His gift. So the mercy in which we rejoice comes to us with the dawn, before we have done a solitary stroke of work. His compassions fly on the wings of the breaking light. They fall like manna, before the sunrise. Unlike

the manna, they never melt with the waxing heat of the sun. His mercies await us by our bed at waking, await us even when we prevent the night watches. God's love has been renewing itself by silent watching, as the frame of the toiler renews its energies by dreamless sleep. The regulations of the court at Peking are so framed as to give to the Chinese empire an example of promptness and despatch. The emperor always receives his cabinet ministers and councillors at three or four o'clock in the morning, long before day-dawn. And so God awaits His servants with new pardons, new counsels, new honours in His kingdom, long before the day-dawn. In all His intercourse with us, He is characterized by a gracious and unfailing timeliness. You need not wait a moment for what God has ready for you. Do not suppose that you are to realize the fulness of His favour only when you are half-way through your pilgrimage, or have passed long hours of desolation and unrest. "The God of my mercies shall go before me." God's mercies are new for you at the outset of every morning. There are some flowers that do not open till noon, and others that pour out the stores of rare spices hidden in their hearts at sunset only. God's mercy begins to shine before the sun, and diffuses its incense about our path through every succeeding hour of the day. An ingenious botanist, by watching the hours at which certain flowers opened, hit upon the pretty conceit of constructing what he called a flower clock. God's matchless mercies, like circles of thick set bloom that break into splendour with a rhythm that never halts, are measuring out the successive hours of our life. No winter comes to blast the flowers, and the clock is never behind time. His opening compassions anticipate the light. "They are new every morning."

V. These words suggest *the perpetual freshness of the Divine nature*. If each of God's mercies were as much like the other as two drops of rain in a shower, or two blades of grass in a field, a deep and true discernment would still show us that such mercy came to us with the impress of a perfectly new message upon it. God's compassions are unceasingly new, because they well, pure and fair, out of the sacred and stainless and infinite depths of His Fatherhood. They have the ever-renewed and living sweetness of His own spring-like nature in them. A smile never grows old, because it is kindness turned into the grace of outward line, and the charm of kindness is undying. Art may pall upon the taste, and music jar to torture over-wrought nerves. But not so the smile of sincere and unaffected human kindness. A smile with the love of a finite

nature behind it is always new. How much more is that true of a smile with the infinite kindness behind it! God's daily mercies come to us clothed with the enkindled grace of His own matchless smile, and full of the light of an immortal May-time. He cannot give or do without putting the buoyancy of His own untiring and eternal youth into each boon and act. Charles Lamb, in a few wise and beautiful sentences, dedicates one of his books to his afflicted sister Mary, with whom he had been living for years in tender and unselfish affection. He says that "when people are living together day by day, they are too apt to take for granted the affection they bear each other, and to forget those special expressions of affection that are the gauge of its true and constant depth." He would therefore make the publication of his book the occasion for that special expression of love he might have forgotten to render amidst the bustle and routine and commonplace of daily life. God is always with us, but He never suffers us to take His tender affection for granted. Each of His daily mercies comes to us with a new dedication upon it. It is a legible evangel, witnessing to the exceeding love of our Father on high. It is not at great crises only that God pours forth the message of His lavish love. If we have come to look upon His daily gifts as common, if we have thought of the love they set forth as less than intense, concentrated, always miraculous, it is because we have been too dull to read the messages with which His daily providences are inscribed. Every gift bears some imprint received within His very heart. His nature cannot be so exhausted by its wide and multiform activities, that He must needs assume we know all about His love, and there is no need to declare it afresh.

Men get the power of doing some things unconsciously. Certain groups of nerves have been so trained and exercised, that they can almost do their work without a separate and distinct and complete process of thought. We can sign our names, read without putting the separate letters composing a word together, and run through strains of music without knowing it. The physiologists call it "unconscious cerebration." This power is necessary to conserve nervous force for higher uses. If a conscious and complete act of thought were necessary for every little performance in life, we should be wasted to shadows before our work was done. There is no "unconscious cerebration" in God. His mighty and exhaustless nature does not need to store up its forces by humiliating economies of that sort. All His providences are *particular* providences. Every act in God is related to a distinct, conscious and full-orbed

thought. There are no automatic adjustments in His government. In every movement of His providence there is fresh thought, fresh purpose, fresh rush of affection ; for stale motive, trite method, servile reduplication, are the marks of weak and effete natures. He would be untrue to all the wealth and resource and moral affluence of His own nature, unless the gracious methods and motives of His providence were always revivifying themselves. The mercy issuing from such a nature must be ever new. As the human mind gives off moral and intellectual force in ever-increasing quantities, it must needs take periods of ever-increasing length to gather force for fresh effort. Minds that could once recuperate after great strain by twenty-four hours' rest come to need a week, or a fortnight, or a month. The longer the life runs on, the greater the period needed to repair exhaustion. Mercy, the most conspicuous energy of God, after its vastest puttings-forth, is instantaneously renewed.

Mr. Ruskin says in his lectures on the Political Economy of Art, that sculptors work more slowly on repetitions than on new and original designs. Let one man be set to make duplicates of a capital, and another be set to work capitals, each of which shall be varied in design, the man who works from varied designs will excel the other in speed, as well as quality of work. The newness of interest lends zest and charm and energy to the workmanship. Sir Thomas Dean, the architect of the New Museum at Oxford, told Mr. Ruskin that capitals of varied design could be executed thirty per cent. cheaper than capitals of the same repeated design.

And the life of the Godhead could scarcely be sustained in its vigour and tenseness and immortal splendour and potency without ever-varying methods of providential development and illustration. A God who was not supremely original could not be the infinite and only God. He could not sustain His own vitality by insipid reiterations. He abhors strict and servile duplicates. Perennial originality is the very sinew of His work. When I am told that God's mercies are new every morning, it is but consistent with all I know of God's measureless energies. I do not know how His activities could be sustained unless it were so. Each of His ever-recurring compassions is rooted in keen, conscious, resolute thought. All His gifts are baptized in the fragrance and freshness of their Divine fountain.

How sweet and lightsome life would be to us, if we could only enter into the prophet's view of the ever-renewed mercy with which it is filled ! Solomon had jaded his nature with false luxury and

mock grandeur, and voluptuous habits that would have better suited a pagan, when he moaned out his epitaph upon human life, "There is nothing new under the sun." Some one has said he counted the sun itself "a piece of warmed-up pleasantry only." A Frenchman would have put an end to himself when he had reached that point. Solomon was kept from that madness by his reserve of religious principle, and made to warn all the ages against the vanity of a life spent away from God. He would have tuned his harp to a better key than that, if, like his father, he had bathed his spirit day by day in the fountain of God's perpetual goodness. He could not see the goodness and mercy that were ever following him. Is life wearisome and insipid? It is because we are blind to God's ever-renewed mercies. Those mercies come to us every morning with the bloom and dew upon them. They are not the rehabilitated mercies of the past only. Could we get into more active fellowship with God, and realize the fresh message from His presence imprinted on every gift of His providence, how life would be reinvigorated, and stagnant pulses bound again!

I read the other day of a man who had lost his sense of taste through the shock of a railway collision. And some of us are like that. Our faith has had its shocks, and our hope its disappointments, and our life-plan its abrupt and disastrous interruptions, and we sometimes find it an empty counsel to "taste and see that the Lord is good." We fail to appreciate the newness of His daily mercy. He who is renewing our mercies is renewing likewise the subtle tastes and discernments of the inward man; and if we let Him work His will within us, our spiritual senses will be restored, and we shall be quick to discern the transcendent compassion and the unfailing faithfulness and truth of His daily dealings with us.

It is fitting that new mercies should be greeted with new songs. The heart alive to the freshness of God's mercy will find new language in which to express itself. Some people think they can best express their sense of God's new mercies by using the tritest phraseology they can find. However ready God may be to suffer, nay, to accept the worship that best suits in its form the taste and education of the worshipper, I believe an ever-new worship is the ideal we should ever set before us. It is the worship that best answers to the nature of Him whose mercies are "new every morning." An overpowering view of God's ever-renewed mercy will create the desire not only for new forms of speech, but for a new language in which to praise Him. I can quite understand the yearning in the early Church for the gift of tongues. When

the psalmist had received a new manifestation of mercy he wished to "sing a new song unto the Lord." As far as our natural limitations will permit, let us find new speech in which to praise Him. When the Lamb leads His redeemed flock to the living fountains of waters, and they realize the eternal newness of God's mercy aright, it will be "a new song" answering to the ever-renewed mercies that they will sing.

Whilst passing in early manhood through a stage of deep dejection, John Stuart Mill found occasional comfort in music. One day he was thrown into a state of profound gloom by the thought that musical combinations were exhaustible. The octave was only composed of five tones and two semi-tones. Not all the combinations of these notes were harmonious, so there must be a limit somewhere to the possibilities of melody.

No such possibility can limit the range of "the new song," for it shall be pitched to the key of God's ever-renewed mercies. We need not dread an eternity of monotonous, mill-round worship. The originality of God's mercy will be a spring of originality in us. The mercy, fresh in its upspringing, and ever passing through new and unanticipated manifestations and developments, shall lead the song of the redeemed through new labyrinths of melody and out into new worlds of power. Oh that we had more newness and vitality in our praises here, so that they might become less unworthy of the mercies which are new every morning !

Look upon the mercies of every morning as the call to a new and a deepening consecration of spirit and life. The Jew of old never touched food, till the smoke of the burnt-offering had been seen ascending above the temple walls. The burnt-offering was the type of the consecrated life of the covenant people. Let it be the earliest concern of the day, as His mercy attends us at our uprising, to obey the call of His mercy, and give ourselves up to His gracious will. "I beseech you, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service."

VI.

THE IRONIES OF WORSHIP.

"Go and search diligently for the young Child; and when ye have found Him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship Him also."—*Matt.* ii. 8.

"THE scoffing knave! What! Herod engaging to become a worshipper of the infant Messiah?" Yes, and not consciously forswearing himself either; for we must remember that Herod, like his ancestor Esau, was a man whose character was strangely composite and paradoxical. He had Abrahamic blood in his veins, and with that blood there came, in spite of the flagrant and undisciplined practical life, gusts of vehement religious passion. The uncommon crimes in which he was a participator deadened, but never altogether crushed, this religious passion. In his projected worship of the Messiah, Herod was an inadvertent rather than a deliberate ironist. It is inconceivable that from the very beginning he was hiding a sharply formulated scheme of wilful Messiahcide in his heart. To keep in view this possible rival for power, or this possible instrument for the revenges of Providence, was his chief concern for the present. It was expedient that he should possess early information of the birth and career of any pretender to the Jewish throne, and so have the power to checkmate and control whatever movement might grow up around a new name. The elements of irony in his devout profession horrify us, when brought into contrast with the subsequent procedure of the unscrupulous tyrant, rather than when compared with the probable thought of the moment. If Herod had cherished in his heart any immediate design of evil against the Lord's Anointed, he would have sent his own spies and instruments to Bethlehem in the track of the wise men, and not have confided the success of his plot to irresponsible strangers. It was when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men that his purpose had a premature ripening, and the demon awoke within his soul.

The *ironies of worship*, is the topic suggested by these words from the lips that afterwards decreed the murder of the Innocents. If we look at character in its primary elements, we shall perhaps find that the generation of Herods is not quite extinct. The temper in which some men deal with sacred things would seem to show that, up to a certain point, Herod is one of the popular models of the day, although perhaps very few recognise the original by which they shape themselves. The man who is as bad at heart as the crafty and unscrupulous Idumæan, although not endowed with the same official opportunities for bloodshed, not infrequently professes himself a devout worshipper of the Divine Child. Worship has its shrill ironies still, and many an uncrowned Herod, a composite of piety and ambition, reverential outward deportment and hard barbarity of soul that shrinks back from no oppression or outrage, mingles with the pilgrims to Bethlehem, and seeks to fulfil, after some fashion, his mocking vow.

I. The worshipper who shows any trace of *patronage or supercilious assumption* in his worship is a mocker and an ironist. In the pious purpose avowed by Herod these characteristics most unmistakably betray themselves. Herod had been a wonderful patron and benefactor in his time. Scarcely any popular object or interest had been denied his royal favour. He had patronised everything. It was by his munificence that the temple in Jerusalem had been rebuilt upon a scale of surpassing grandeur. And to make things fair all round, he had rebuilt the temple on Gerizim for the Samaritans also. And then, lest the Romans should suspect him of fostering with undue zeal the sentiment of Jewish nationality, in Cæsarea and other centres he built theatres and pagan temples. Herod was prepared to patronise with the most catholic and indiscriminating generosity any party whatsoever whose support might subsequently become useful to him. He was an uncivilized Napoleon, and like the last reigning representative of that remarkable family of adventurers, who endowed the Roman Catholic Church, half-a-dozen Protestant denominations, and the Opera House, he was accustomed to bestow his favour anywhere, if there was a reasonable probability of political adhesion in exchange. His patronage was perhaps too catholic to be worth very much, and far too lavish for the tastes of the people from whom he drew his revenues. He had given his countenance to the surviving members of the Maccabæan family. He had backed with his official favour the man who filled the high

priesthood. He had patronised the benefactors through whose influence he had vaulted into power, and subsequently compassed their ruin. In the exercise of this condescending patronage and support he doubtless found immense satisfaction, for the time being at least, till the patronage turned into persecution, and yielded still more perfect satisfaction to his evil nature. And now a new object of interest and solicitude comes into view. Herod had doubtless watched many a budding Mahdi in his day, and had seized the timely moment for striking dismay into the hearts of his restless followers. But now the sign and the forecast of some new movement appears. He may have heard the rumours of a strange expectation that have filled the air. He is familiar with the promise of an ideal king who shall rule in righteousness. Perhaps he half believes it. Wrinkled old saints at the Temple in Jerusalem are beginning to say that the accomplishment has already dawned. And at this very juncture a self-constituted embassy or commission of sun-bronzed strangers from afar, guiding its marches through the desert by a sign in the sky, appears in the streets of Jerusalem. Should such a Child as they seek have been born, a Child bearing the stamp of a supernatural royalty, a destined King with appropriate credentials, Herod is prepared to recognise Him in some way. He will acknowledge the spiritual superiority of this chosen Child, and bow before Him in worship, if the adherents of the Child will only leave him his present temporal power. He will show his goodwill to the Child and its fortunes, by putting every facility within reach of the strangers who have come from far to honour It. The best learning of Jerusalem shall be placed at their service. The national literature shall yield its secrets for their guidance. A council of doctors is summoned by royal edict. The patronage is generous and pains-taking. It is more than nominal, but it is patronage still. And these scholarly men from the East are made to feel the haughty assumption of the half-barbarian potentate. On the strength of his kingship, he issues orders to these devout and cultured men, as though they were the meanest slaves of his household. "When ye have found Him, bring me word again." What a privilege for these men of rank and learning to post hither and thither to fulfil the bequests of this mediatised king! "That I also may come and worship Him." What wonderful condescension! The crowned monarch about to bow before some unknown Infant just born within his dominions! In comparison with himself, the Child is an atom of helpless babyhood. Can he not succour It?

May not his homage possibly bring to the Child victory without a struggle, and be the one thing that shall unseal its secret providential destinies? He is prepared to recognise in the Child, more or less vaguely, a higher dignity than his own, although perhaps not qualities that are absolutely and essentially 'Divine. The Child might represent David's line, and represent it in unapproachable excellence ; and even more than that. Yet in spite of these undefined elements of superiority in the Child, he cannot stoop to go as seeker and suitor himself to the cradle-shrine. Not only might that excite the suspicion of the Romans, but it would compromise his position with the populace. A king must never forget his dignity, however careless he may be about his morals. The recipient of patronage must not expect too much from his patron. For the present all search and all worships shall be delegated to others. It would be unseemly in a king to go tramping up and down the province of Judæa, peeping into the holes and corners of cottages and lodging-houses, to ferret out a possible Messiah. Mortals of inferior majesty, whose position is not likely to be compromised, must first find the shrine. Enough if Herod worship when the Messiah is found and declared. "I also will come and worship Him." A not unhandsome thing for Herod to worship a Child whom many would regard as a rival and competitor !

But when God sent back the wise men by another way, not only did He show Himself jealous for the position of these wise men, but mindful likewise both of the life and the honour of His Son. When the flavour of patronage creeps into worship, it turns the worship into irony, and makes it unfit for God's acceptance and approval. There was the harshest possible contradiction between this temper of haughty patronage and condescension, and the first condition of the worship Herod was proposing to offer. Baal may listen with sleepy good-nature to the voice of irony that rises from beside his altar, but God never. A worship dominated by this temper is a worship that He will notice only to judge and to reject. Neither from the long-robed Pharisee, inflating himself in the Temple courts, nor from Herod giving his royal word that the Messiah once found he will become a pilgrim and a devotee, will God tolerate for Himself and His Son a worship of languid patronage and supercilious assumption.

And the Herods whose worship is sheer irony did not die out with the ages that were the ages of tyrants, pretenders, and changeling kings. Herods live under limited monarchies, republics, democracies, and quite as often wear fustian as purple.

We sometimes speak as though arrogance, patronage, supercilious pretension had disappeared with the establishment of constitutional governments, and all Herods had been levelled down to the standpoint of the unprivileged crowd. Perhaps the truer way of putting it is, that the people have been levelled up to the platform on which the Herods once moved, and Herods have come to overrun the world. The modern civilizations have given us as much power, splendour, freedom of movement, control over all the conditions of material life, as were once the monopolies of the old-world despots. They would have thought themselves high in the favour of Fortune, if they could have won by the sword or bought with the revenues of provinces the facilities for travel, domestic comfort, service of every kind, that are our common inheritance. We of course are "the public," and "the servants of the public" minister to our comfort and convenience in ways of which Herod's armies of slaves were quite incapable. All but the very poorest in our midst would be mightily discontented if they had to exchange dinner tables with Herod. The stateliest room in Herod's palace at Jericho was a kennel in comparison with your carpeted parlour, and his throne a rack in comparison with your lounge or easy-chair. Of course we are not above constitutional law, as were the old-world tyrants, but in all other respects our sense of influence, power, authority is wider in its range than theirs.

Now this growth of the mastery and magnificence of common life brings its temptations. We are served on so many hands, and in so many ways, that we are prone to become little Herods, and in our miserable conceit and self-sufficiency affect to patronise the things that are immeasurably above us. We make ourselves masters of so many material forces, the sense of ever-enlarging dominion so intoxicates us, that if we would only confess it to ourselves, we should find that we are sometimes in danger even of patronising God, God manifested in the flesh at least. We measure Divine things by rough and ready outward standards, as Herod probably measured the undiscovered Babe at Bethlehem. We admit that God has manifested Himself in the history of the Church, and that there has been mystery in the manifestation; but then the grandeur of the manifestation seems to be limited by finite and human conditions. Like Herod, we see the Babe in its weakness, and forget the infinite majesty veiled under the form of flesh. The human associations and surroundings of worship blind us to its mysterious and unfathomable solemnity and sacredness. There are infantile elements in the prevailing conception of God,

We forget the unseen elements that are unutterably Divine. And the mind that is at once proud and superficial, or perhaps superficial because it is proud, brings its offering of favour, patronage, condescension, where the wise and the lowly bring the choicest love of consecrated spirits. Are we not perhaps sometimes found thinking how immensely good it is of us to come to a place of worship at all? God ought to be indefinitely thankful that we are not atheists. Just as Herod doubtless found a smug satisfaction in the fact that he was not hostile in his attitude to the Jewish faith, like an idolatrous Roman, not a profane and blaspheming Syrian, who desecrated the sanctities of Jewish worship, like Antiochus Epiphanes, but a patronising Idumæan, half-brother to the Jew; so we flatter ourselves that, if we are not thorough-going Christians, we at least give our voice, and our countenance, and our formal reverence to the side of God and His Son. I am afraid Christ's servants sometimes unwittingly foster this temper by going about their work as though they were soliciting business, or canvassing for votes, rather than as ambassadors sent by the King to herald claims that are matchless in their perfect royalty. The flippancy of not a few of our worshippers would be simply laughable, if it were not so profoundly sad. What an honour they confer upon the Church and the minister by coming once a day even! They decline a second service, or any week-night claim upon their devotion, with the haughty serenity that would be just appropriate if they were declining an impertinent application for a subscription. Their temper seems to suggest the idea that they have befriended God, and that if He ever comes to the earth again He will come in a deferential attitude, to acknowledge the obligations under which they have so often placed Him by their formal homage. They scarcely imagine it is an unrevealed Judge they worship. From beginning to end their worship is complacent patronage, and as such it is awful irony, upon which God frowns, and will ever frown. God can afford to dispense with your patronage. He does not want it either for Himself or for His Child Jesus. Remember that in the Lord's house there is but one Lord. King and subject, master and servant, are on the same level. At His shrine there is only one benefactor—He who blesses from above the mercy-seat. We are the poor who come to be filled. The crown and the purple must be cast aside in God's presence, and in the presence of His Son. Beware of the specious condescension and the pompous pretence which exclaims, "Bring me word again, that I may come and worship Him also."

II. The worship that rests upon *second-hand knowledge* is worship that always has within it an undertone of irony.

Worship should be accorded only to that which is above ourselves, and that which is above ourselves must always be entitled to reverent personal search, inquiry, investigation. The worship of the utterly unknown is a mockery. The worship that is made to depend upon the result of a delegated process of proof is a mockery no less. We pay no true honour to God when we go with the crowd, and believe because the crowd believe or because somebody else tells us to believe. That which we commit to the search of another we account by that very fact a second-rate thing.

Herod made light of the Messiah in his secret soul, whilst uttering this word of honour with his lips. Great man that he was, he could not bow himself to search for the Babe in whom were hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. If the Romans gave a political interpretation to this Messianic office, to which a providential Babe had been born, it might endanger his throne to go and ask for the Babe, and pay this vaunted homage at its feet. Costly inquiry that! If the Romans made this Messiahship purely religious in its significance, to undertake the pilgrimage might make him the butt of their scorn. It was beneath his dignity, as well as perilous to his position, to go upon this quixotic enterprise. Everything must be brought to him. The Magi must become religious slaves, truth-seekers, and worship-tasters in his interest. He would only follow in their footsteps.

True, he was not so dependent upon these Magi for knowledge as might appear from his words. He could fill up gaps in the visions of these perplexed Orientals. He held in his own hand in Jerusalem links in the chain of evidence. But a proud, bad man, who puts on the profession of a worshipper, is always more or less a worshipper of the future. He assumes that the evidence is more or less incomplete which is to fully and irresistibly accredit to his heart and conscience the great object of his worship. He can only justify himself by putting his worship into the future tense. The way to the shrine has not been opened. The Magi have the last section of their journey yet to make. A proud, bad man will scarcely ever admit that he has the chain of evidence in his own hand, and that he ought to become a personal seeker after truth. The search must be delegated. The work must be undertaken by others. Herod cannot stoop from his throne. It would be unsuited to his majesty to wear sackcloth, and wet the path of his pilgrimage with penitential tears, and ask for the Child come from God

to give rest to the terror-haunted conscience, to banish bloody dreams with the sweet spell of His forgiveness, to uplift the lowly, and to rule in righteousness and the fear of the Most High. It would be a practical abdication of the throne. True, the Child to save Herod has abdicated a throne about which the angels stand ; but Herod cannot do that upon even a mean, earthly scale. All worship is a mockery, unless it be connected with the complete abdication of the proud self within us, and the humble, personal, earnest seeking after God's face.

And this spirit of half-hearted interest and second-hand inquiry, which was closely related to the spirit of patronage and supercilious assumption in Herod, not uncommonly characterizes our own generation. We can command so many things by the magic pass-words a scientific civilization has put into our lips, that we quietly assume we ought to be able to command the most sacred of all knowledge likewise, and that too at the hands of others. So intoxicated are we with the spirit of pride, that we insist everything shall be brought to us. Our religion must be "laid on" like the gas and the hot and cold water in our houses. It must be brought round to us like the supplies of food that come in carts and barrows, and that make it possible for people to live without crossing their thresholds into the town. If God wants our worship, He must take steps to secure it. He cannot expect us to obey a vaguely credited faith. We make our demands upon His servants. The wise men must search out the mystery, and when they have found it come and fetch us. Ministers must think for us. They must produce their strong reasons.

The thing to be dreaded in our times is not so much the spirit of active inquiry as the proud spirit of delegated inquiry, of which Herod was an example. You can never get anything but a worship of mockery out of that spirit. Do you not see, if God is not worth thinking about, He cannot be worth worshipping? The worship that rests upon second-hand ideas does not honour Him. Let a man be humble in heart, and he will always be ready to seek the Lord in person. No scheme for the division of labour is possible here. Herod cannot be sitting in ease and pomp upon his throne, whilst a Persian embassy goes forth to discover the true shrine for his worship. Every man must seek for himself. True worship starts in a discovery of self, and by self, and the worship that lacks this root is an irony. Delegate your religious thought and research and inquiry to others, trust in human authority however wise and holy, and your life will end in darkness. For the

shepherds, rough and untaught and lowly, there is the guiding hand from above. For Anna and Simeon, as they totter with their wistful, wrinkled faces about the Temple threshold, there is the sure dayspring of inward prophecy. By years of prayer they have been searching for the Hope of Israel, and they find. But there is no high, spiritual leading for the man who proudly delegates his search to others. The wise men and the mighty Herod never met again on earth. They returned to their own country another way. The star, like a new pillar of fire, shone to light the journey from Jerusalem up to the slopes of Bethlehem, but it never shone to light the journey from Bethlehem back to the palace of Herod. Herod may go with them, if he will humble himself to go. The star sets, and they can never return to fetch him. The finger of Providence points them along another pathway. Remember, delegated search on religious questions will never lead you to God. If God is worth worshipping at all, He is worth finding out. The worship you propose to offer upon the basis of second-hand knowledge, second-hand observation, second-hand inquiry, is a worship of irony that God will scorn.

III. The worship into which *vague fear, sordid interest, and thoughts of possible compromise* enter is always worship that will have a terrible ring of irony about it. Herod, we are told, was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. Although the supposed Messiah could not head any movement in person for many years to come, yet these floating rumours might very seriously disturb and unsettle the balance of parties. A new-born child could not very well change the history of the immediate future. But Herod had faith enough to know that if this Child were indeed the Lord's Anointed, the Child would one day prove Himself invincible, and neither Herod nor Herod's successor would be able to defeat or frustrate His power. To keep this new-born rival in view would be a shrewd act of statecraft. It might be even well to quietly treat the Child as a *protégé* of the Idumæan throne. Homage paid to the Child in its infancy might conciliate the more fanatical sections of the Jewish population, and prepare the way for an offensive or defensive alliance in days to come. Herod had hitherto proved himself quite an adept at plausible intrigue and compromise. He had a genius for this kind of work. He had made compromises not a few with the surviving representatives of the Maccabæan family, but compromises that generally ended in more or less direct and judicial murders. He had used Antigonus for a time, and then bribed the Romans to put him to death. With the view of uniting, in his

own line, all the Maccabæan claims, he had wedded the noble Mariamne ; and then, under the influence of unjust suspicion and jealousy, had murdered her. He had helped Mariamne's brother, Aristobulus, to the high priesthood, and when he saw the popular favour into which he rose, had him drowned in the pools in his own pleasure gardens at Jericho. He had made his compromise with John Hyrcanus, and in the end had compassed his death by judicial forms. It is true his compromises had very unfortunate issues, issues that possibly he himself did not contemplate at the outset. Should the new name in the house of David gather to itself a new following, some new compromise, it may be, will be possible in that direction. Why resist the decrees of Fate, if the new-born Child is to become the ruling personality of the times ? Homage shall be paid to Him, if that will help to preserve the figment of the Herodian throne. In some form or other the dynasty may yet last for generations. Rome had been conciliated. The Asmonean house had been squared for the time. If a national Messianic party is about to come into existence, why not court the Infant of its hopes ? "I also will come and worship Him."

If our worship is in any sense the worship of vague fear, sordid interest, possible compromise, it is characterized by an irony equally terrible. Are there not worshippers in our midst who, without cherishing any fixed and steady faith in Christianity, think it is not well to lose sight of it altogether ? They scarcely hope that their temporal affairs will prosper, unless they preserve some sort of respect for God's Church and God's claims. They want to make the best of both worlds, particularly of this. There is enough of probability in Christianity to make them troubled, after the fashion of Herod when he heard of the sign of the new-born King. It is quite conceivable that Christ or Christ's word may one day judge us. It is scarcely wisdom to ignore that possibility ; but there is no free surrender of the throne to Christ. We welcome what looks like an element of vagueness in the evidence, and forget how we ourselves create the vagueness. No complete and immediate abdication of the throne is demanded. Our worship is a possible tribute of the future. It rests perhaps upon a chance. Compromise is the watchword. No reckless repentance, as if the judgment day were close at hand. No wild throwing up of our all, after the fashion of visionaries and fanatics. No pilgrimage of penitent lowliness out to Bethlehem. What unsophisticated mortals these men must be who have dragged themselves for weary months across the scorching deserts, in peril and loneliness and

thirst! The tribunal is scarcely near enough for that kind of thing. But, on the other hand, no impolitic neglect or contempt. We must keep our eyes open, for the unexpected does sometimes happen, at least to the worldling. Suspense, neutrality, intellectual indecision, one eye on this world, or even an eye and a half—this is the very perfection of prudence. “When ye have found Him, bring me word again, that I also may come and worship Him.” There is grim irony in worship of that sort. Reverence, inward consecration, out and out obedience can never be built on a basis of hypothesis. Fear may sometimes be the first step in worship, but love will always be the last. Sordid self-interest and compromise are hostile to the elementary idea, of worship, and turn worship into a jibe.

IV. *Wilfulness, wrongdoing, unquenched revenge* are elements that always impart the crowning touch of irony to a hollow worship.

In the midst of this very pious profession, Herod was still clinging to his own evil past, and to the specious gains won through its many crimes. How could such a man be a worshipper? Worship is a repentance. Was it no irony for hoary and unrelenting guilt to bow itself before the unstained and essential innocence of a Divine childhood? Worship is a trust. Was it no irony for this hard, haughty, independent man, who had not yet done with sin, to feign readiness to cast himself and his guilt on this Child, marked out by prophecy as the sinless Saviour from sin? Worship is a harmony. Was it not an irony for this sinister man to bring the shrill discords of his revolted nature, and to seek to blend them with the rhythmic perfection of the Oné who was to be called “The Lord our Righteousness”? Worship is a submission. Was it not an irony for this man, who was prepared to recognise no law but that of his own caprice, to come and bow himself before that Son through whom God was to speak His perfect law to the world? Worship is a fellowship. Was it not an irony for this merciless, bloodguilty, hard-souled despot to come and bow before the holy Child who was to set forth the infinite mercy and compassion of the great Father of all? Worship is lowliness of soul. Was it not an irony for this vain self-sufficient potentate to come and bow at the feet of Him whose infinite condescension was to be the unending wonder of the universe? “I also will come and worship Him.” What! without a thought of relenting, faith, obedience, humility? That is the worship that brings down the swift thunderbolt, the worship of mockery.

"Ah!" say you, "these lights and shades of thought and feeling and motive in our worship are of no very profound significance. The practical life of the world is not seriously affected by these shortcomings in an over-refined and subtle worship. Men may pay little love and reverence and service to far-off Gods and shadowy Messiahs, and yet be full of love and reverence and useful service to their fellow men." Is it so? The man who is an ironist in his worship is apt to become a fiend in his relation to the common humanity. Mockery towards God curdles into fierce malignity towards man. This feigned devotion unbinds the hands of hell for its crowning triumph. By the mockery of the wise men God answers Herod's mockery, and at last the demon legions start up within the man. In his mingled fear and rage he strikes at the Lord's Anointed, and at the community of innocents with which He is identified. The man who blasphemes God will always be the first to outrage his kind. Let a man hate the pure and gracious Messiah, and his hatred will soon widen into a temper that would crush all the joyfulness of life out of the universe, if it had the power. To appease the disappointment of a thwarted tyrant, to glut the revenge growing up out of his wicked worship of irony, innocent babes must be snatched from their shrieking mothers, and be put to the sword. Herod's life of crime ripens to its terrible fulness. In intention, at least, he becomes the murderer of the infant Messiah, at whose shrine a short while ago he was ready to bow. The piety that is an irony and a pretence will end in the boundless hatred of both God and man.

Let us remember, for our warning, that God always meets the ironies of worship with fearful ironies of retribution.

God makes the wise men to mock the ironist, and so echo the laughter of Him who sits in the heavens, and has the foes of His anointed King in derision. Nay, the Divine Babe unconsciously echoes the mockery of the heavens, as it is carried, smiling in its invulnerable innocence, through the deserts, into Egypt. The Babe is found of the humble, devout shepherds, who worship it with joy. It is found of the despised Gentiles. It smiles back into the faces of the saints who linger round the Temple doors the promise of immortal redemption. But there is no guidance for the man who thinks he can command it in his own time and way, and by his own imperious will. The mocked Herod sinks into silence and darkness, whilst the threatened Babe becomes the unconquerable King, and fills a throne surrounded by the worship of all ages.

This visit of the Magi was perhaps the last moral possibility of a life hurrying on to a terrible close. Warnings, premonitions, opportunities had thronged upon him, and now comes the last act in his probation. Let him follow the sign of the Magi. Let him bow himself before the infant Messiah, and is it too much to say that he may yet slough off his lifelong crimes and become as a child in the kingdom of heaven. But no ! He meets this last opportunity of his life with mockery and disdain. A few months more, and Herod has gone to his doom.

God answers the ironies of worship with stinging ironies of retribution. The Babe and the king go separate ways. Thirty years later the paths of the Babe and of the king who had once professed himself ready to do homage to the Babe, and then struck at its life, intersect. Within sight of the sulphur springs in which Herod bathed for the loathsome disease that ended his life Christ probably spoke the parable of the Pharisee and publican, and blessed the little children. In Jericho, where Herod died in remorse and madness, Christ saved Zacchæus and healed a pair of blind beggars. Up the rocky heights, across which Herod's carrion, covered by a crimson pall, and followed by five hundred slaves bearing spices and incense, had been carried to its last resting-place, Christ journeyed to raise Lazarus and yet again to die for His love to men. But Herod had long passed beyond the reach of the grace Christ never failed to shed along His daily pathway. What an irony of associations !

“Because I have called, and ye refused ; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded ; I also will laugh at your calamity ; I will mock when your fear cometh.”

“Kiss the Son lest He be angry, and ye perish from the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little.”

VII.

SECRET FAULTS.

"Who can understand his errors? cleanse Thou me from secret faults. Keep back Thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me."—*Ps.* xix. 12, 13.

THE marvellous inwardness of some of the views of truth presented in the writings of psalmists and prophets vindicates for those portions of the Old Testament a place of honour we are apt to deny them when we contemplate them as steps in a progressive revelation only. That need of sanctification through a direct act of Divine power upon the individual, expressed in the interjections and prayers of this noble meditation, is so essentially evangelical, that if we were to follow some modern canons of criticism, and fix the age of the book from the depth and maturity of the teaching it contains, we should have to put the composition of the nineteenth psalm into the apostolic era. The Psalmist's sense of the fact, that there could be no indiscriminate salvation through Church or human organization or external and vicarious service, was just as clear as that of St. Paul himself. He felt that he could not be effectually cleansed by his relation to the theocracy, or the national sacrifices, or the visible system and service of religion, in connexion with which he was perhaps already a leading figure. The ceremonial offering did not necessarily bring the purification of the spirit. He must be cleansed by a virtue coming down from God and through God's unknown sacrifice, and not by a power going up from himself and through his own trespass offering. The law, with its frequent and curiously graded sacrifices, had been but a remembrancer of certain selected sins, and had led him to see that all corruption, in its wider ravage and more insidious penetration, must be purged by a Divine process. In mingled wonder and alarm at the subtle and unsuspected phases

assumed by evil in the human soul, he exclaims, "Who can understand his errors? cleanse Thou me from secret faults." And in dread of the overpowering passion evil sometimes kindles in human life, passion in which all knowledge is trampled under foot, and all responsibility flung contemptuously away, he exclaims, "Keep back Thy servant also from presumptuous sins ; let them not have dominion over me."

Let us look awhile at this twofold deliverance asked in the Psalmist's prayer : grace to cleanse from secret, and power to keep back from presumptuous sin.

The outline of this classification, under which David brings all the factors of human conduct, is to be found in the law of Moses. In the fifteenth chapter of the book of Numbers we find specific sacrifices provided for what are termed "sins of ignorance," thoughtless, inadvertent, and involuntary transgressions of the Divine law, more especially in its ritual aspects. From the next few verses we gather that for sins of presumption, conscious, premeditated, transgressions of the Divine law, there was no sacrifice, but the soul guilty of them should be cut off from the congregation.

But though David took this classification as his starting point, he did not adopt rigid Mosaic definitions in his interpretation of it, for the boundary line between these two types of sin was necessarily a line that shifted with the individual and the epoch. Secret sin may shade off by almost imperceptible degrees into the presumptuous sin for which there is no sacrifice or redemption. A sin that is inadvertent and expiable in an untaught pagan may be the crowning sin against light in me with the Bible in my hands. The sins that were sins of ignorance eighteen centuries before Christ came are not improbably sins of presumption eighteen centuries after His coming. The law was a living teacher in the heart of David, and not a mere cluster of enactments. It had made him wise in his simplicity, and poured light upon his eyes. The ceremonial offences that had been sing'ed out by special offerings required for their expiation had been but hints of a whole world of half-conscious thought and action that might be displeasing before Him whose name and nature were holy. The law was relative, not absolute, limited by the measure of man's capacity to understand and to do, not an exhaustive expression of the measureless holiness of the Divine attributes, or the limit of the demand that God's righteousness might yet come to make upon human conduct. Wider and yet wider circles of revelation might spread themselves out from the central principles of the Decalogue, and yet God, in

the unsearchable vastness of His character, still "dwell in the light that no man could approach unto." The Psalmist felt that the living law of the Most High was far keener than the man's own conscience in its outlook upon the daily life, and that law was but a fragmentary and not a complete revelation of the Divine purity. Thus, with the Psalmist's advancing education in the truth, some sins had been moving out from the region of half conscious into that of conscious sin, the line at which definite knowledge and responsibility commenced had been retreating farther and farther back into the darkness, and more delicate questions of duty had come within the expanding horizon of enlightenment and obligation, than concerned him in the days of his cruder knowledge and narrower religious capacity.

And is it not thus with all of us? Our life, like the globe on which we live, has two hemispheres: the one in which our activities are revealed and discriminated, the other in which our activities are covered up by the darkness; the one a broad band of light, the other a broad band of shadow, upon which the light is always gaining. Our life is made up of inward and manifested sins: sins that are not only secret from our fellow men, but secret in part even from ourselves; and sins into which we go with our eyes open; sins against light; deliberate, foredetermined, persistent sins;—sins of presumption.

We may perhaps compare that development of moral sensitiveness which the law is always promoting within every right-minded man with those advances of physical science by which unknown worlds above and beneath us have been brought into view, and disease detected in stages in which its presence was unsuspected by our forefathers. A century ago man's observations had not got very far beyond the range of his unassisted senses. Our astronomers have scarcely completed the sum of the stars brought into view by the newest telescopes, and the late Dr. Draper, of New York, succeeded in getting photographs of stars upon which no human eye had looked. His gelatine plates were endued with a finer discernment than the optic sense of the living observer. The biologist has discovered just as many new worlds as the student of the heavens. He finds sphere of marvellous life within sphere, and yet other spheres more deeply hidden within these, like ball within ivory ball in oriental carving. An Italian doctor brings his microscope to bear, and, floating within a foot of the soil of the Campagna, finds the malignant bacillus which is at the root of the malarial fever of Rome. Another doctor asserts that he is able to

put his finger upon the specific germ of the choleraic poison, a diminutive antagonist for which men have been watching for years, and whose shadow sometimes brings a disquiet into the politics of Europe scarcely second to that of the Czar, the Sultan, or the Mahdi. Pasteur claims to have identified the specific virus of hydrophobia. He can tell it as unmistakably as you can tell the face of your bitterest business rival. Our forefathers knew only the superficial facts of disease, corruption, decay. The biologist brings his concentrated lenses and his polarized light to bear, and he watches every movement of the tiny armies of iconoclasts as they undermine and break up the structure of the body at points where the ordinary observer did not suspect their presence. He projects an electric beam through tubes filled with sifted air, and the air is found to teem with spores that are undeveloped epidemics, with potentialities of world-wide disaster in them. Within recent times we have heard of the elaboration of instruments that may reveal new worlds of sound to us, as marvellous as the worlds of form revealed by the microscope. It is said that no man ever knows what his own voice is like till he hears it in Mr. Edison's phonograph. We are told of another instrument, by which the breathings of insects are made audible. The medical expert may yet be able to detect the faintest murmur of abnormal sound in the system, that indicates the approach of disease. Ingenious appliances will register for us variations of temperature that are too fine for our dull senses to perceive. We have stepped from time to time into new realms of interest and knowledge and sensation, and undiscovered realms yet lie before us. To the eye and to the ear of the Maker all these worlds have been open from the beginning. They are just coming into our horizon with the development of science.

And in the same way there must be the growth within us of a fine moral science, that will bring home to our apprehension the most obscure of our secret faults. Of all the sciences, that of self-knowledge is in the most primitive and neglected state. We are mysterious to ourselves, full of unknown lapses and limitations. All our latent defects, all the spiritual inaptitudes that at the outset escape our attention, are known to the Searcher of our heart long before we become fully conscious of them. He not only hears the "I go not" of the bold, rebellious son, but the faint murmur of disease underlying the lip-service of formal worship and the well-practised affectations of a constrained obedience. He not only detects the wounds and bruises and putrefying sores of flagrant

transgressors, but the hidden blight that settles so noiselessly upon the pieties of His own people, and depraves the vitality of religion, and poisons the spring of its secret virtue. The awful beam from His presence strikes across our self-purified and self-sifted life, and detects thoughts and solicitations and unwholesome sympathies that are the hidden and deeply-folded cells in which sin conceives itself. Divine law is sent forth to enlighten all who are docile to its monitions, to search into the deep places of action, and to create a perfect inward as well as outward righteousness. "Its going forth," like that of the sun with which the Psalmist links it in his comparison, "is from the end of heaven, and its circuit unto the end of it ; and there is nothing hid from the heat thereof." And as this clear and ever-growing light from God is projected across our souls, we come to feel that we are full of secret corruptions,—corruptions fraught with peril both to ourselves and others ; corruptions that, unless cleansed by continuous and immeasurable grace from God, must prevail at last over the things that are lovely and of good report. Under this widening horizon of penetrating light we come to suspect that there may yet be undisclosed corruptions within us, and we are constrained to cry that the purifying power of God may go deeper than our own knowledge,—deep as God's knowledge, deep as a beam of that mysterious light which, unapproachable itself, yet approaches and enters into the soul of all things. "Thou hast set our iniquities before Thee, our secret sins in the light of Thy countenance."

"But how can there be responsibility for sins of which we are ignorant ? and how can there be guilt without responsibility ?" I do not want to so exalt the holiness of God as to rob Him of His winsome reasonableness. That would not be the way to honour Him. If the ignorance is fated and incurable, of course there can be no responsibility. Does not ignorance however often spring from courses of action that we ourselves choose and pursue ? Is it not often quite possible for us to remove it ? In all such cases the ignorance is not without guilt. If we consider the conditions under which these secret sins spring up, we shall see that at the root of them there is very often an element of unmistakable wilfulness. Secret sins arise from inadequate religious knowledge, and neglect of religious thought and instruction not infrequently explains this defect of knowledge. Secret sins arise from the fact that passions which are antagonistic to keen intellectual and religious susceptibility are cherished, and passion is always more or less under the control of the will. Secret sins arise through association with men

whose common frailties blind us to our own ; and it is at our own choice that we enter into these associations, or, at least, that we suffer ourselves to be so completely absorbed by them.

Many of our sins are secret from us because we *fail to improve our opportunities of religious thought and instruction*. These opportunities vary in every life, although they are perhaps never altogether wanting. The fact that no hard and fast line can be drawn, but that secret sin is culpable in exact proportion to our privilege, is illustrated at the outset of the Mosaic legislation. In the fourth chapter of the book of Leviticus a law is enunciated that deals with this particular question. Different sacrifices are required for the sin of ignorance in the priest, the ruler of the people, and the private individual and proselyte. The priest stood at the head of the chosen people, and, in virtue of his exceptional position, might justly be expected to possess superior knowledge and a more than average sense of the authority and penetrating power of the Divine law. For a sin of inadvertence in the priest, the sacrifice of a bullock, the most costly offering known to the Levitical law, was required. The inadvertence was scarcely excusable in one living in the heart of the daily sanctities. The light of the holy place was about the man's footsteps, and in this case a sin of ignorance crept up almost to the margin of conscious sin. It demanded a costlier atonement than in others. Again, when the ruler of the people had committed a sin of ignorance, he was required to offer a he-goat. His position was not quite so sacred as that of the priest, nor were his religious opportunities so rich and inspiring. But still his life was devoted to high tasks of moral discrimination. He occupied a representative position, and ought to stand out from the rank and file of the congregation in quick perception and sensitive religious tone. When the private individual or proselyte had unwittingly sinned, a she-goat only, a still less costly form of sacrifice, was required. The lowliest were members of the elect congregation and worshippers of Jehovah, and could not be quite absolved from all responsibility, although the opportunities of others might be higher. Vague, infantile, rudimentary as their spiritual perceptions might be, they must recognise the truth that responsibility was boundless in its progressive measurements, and take steps for the ceremonial expiation of their guilt. They were a part of the congregation, and might have walked with more wary footsteps and possessed a more adequate and vigilant knowledge. They had not fully improved their privilege, or they had succumbed to the deadening influence

of circumstance, and there was a certain measure of heinousness in the very ignorance out of which their unconscious sin had sprung.

David obviously felt that the clearness of his spiritual insight was sometimes imperilled by the character of his surroundings. In places where there were no appointed symbols or mementoes of the Divine presence, he felt most profoundly the need of grace to cleanse from those sins of insensibility and forgetfulness to which he was prone. Large portions of his life were spent in exile. He became a wanderer before his youth had passed, and the sanctities of that simple home at Bethlehem faded like the lamps of a retreating shore into the dark background, and the voice that Jesse was wont to uplift in prayer amid the circle of his stalwart sons died into the hush of a plaintive memory. And do we not all know how blunt our moral sensibilities are apt to grow, or, to express it in the fashionable cant of the day, how "broad our views" become when we remove from the intense religious influences of our childhood? And the exile did not end with David's youth. He was cut off in after-life for months, and perhaps for years, from the service of the tabernacle and from its public instructions. Religious truth would lose its authority and incisiveness. The light about which he sang so nobly must have been in partial eclipse through the days of his exile. His soul had to pass through long arctic winters, and arctic winters are not so favourable to immaculate cleanliness as the ever-returning light of our own favoured latitudes. Had not David been alive to his own danger and deprivation, and guarded himself by continuous meditation on God's law, his spiritual perceptions would surely have become obscured, and he would have lapsed into the mere son of Belial, who sins unceasingly against God, and that in stone-dead oblivion of the shameful fact. The Psalmist felt the danger, and lest some delicate duty should have been forgotten where there was so little to stimulate devout affection, lest some high moral perception should have become dimmed in the scenes through which he was called to wander, lest some remote cranny in his life should remain without the clear irradiation of God's law, he appeals to the all-wise God against himself and the moral disabilities of his lot, "Who can understand his errors? cleanse Thou me from secret faults."

Not many of us are debarred from public worship and the ministry of the word and self-examination before the open Scriptures by circumstances that are beyond our own control. Our

soul-binding negligences are for the most part voluntary. And if men lose in self-knowledge through involuntary disability and privation, how much more lamentably must we suffer when we willingly separate ourselves from the influences of the truth ! Does not God see many sins in us of which we are unconscious, because we live in the disuse of our privileges and opportunities ? Perhaps even whilst maintaining outward habits of devotion, we partition off some sphere of inward thought and sensibility from God's deep-reaching law. Is not the inmost heart sometimes closed against the finer applications of the Sermon on the Mount ? Men may not infrequently be met with, who would not cheat, or scheme, or bear false witness for a moment with their eyes open, but they have acquired a wonderful knack of closing their eyes when it is expedient to be momentarily blind. Their minds seem to be built like some ships, in bulkheads or compartments, and they can divide off one section of their consciousness from another at a moment's notice. It is simply marvellous how they always happen to know the thing it is politic to know, and to see the particular side of the question they want to see, and nothing beyond it. They ought to know themselves better than others know them, but outside critics and observers have a more discerning insight into their crookedness and obliquity and little self-deceptions than they themselves. There must be a most guilty limitation somewhere, unless the knowledge you have of yourself goes down to a very much deeper root of motive than the knowledge of your most sagacious censor. Throw down all the slides and barriers that shut off from each other the different parts and faculties of the mind, and let the blaze of Divine light come in. The spaces between the windows of one of the rooms of a famous palace are hung with mirrors, and by this device the walls are made just as luminous as the windows through which the sunshine streams. Every square inch of surface seems to reflect the light. Let your natures be like that, no point of darkness anywhere, the whole realm of the inward life an unchequered blaze of moral illumination. We pride ourselves that we are upright and sincere and without reproach, and yet how little are we prepared to test ourselves through and through by Christ's most searching words ! How much need there is for each of us to breathe the daily prayer, "Cleanse Thou me from secret faults"—cleanse by sending light of inexorably penetrating power, through my dark, myriad-celled mind, and making me to understand my errors !

Many of our sins are secret from us because we insist upon

judging *ourselves by human rather than Divine standards of life and righteousness*. How many of us are the victims of a blind pharisaism, because it has become an honoured tradition with us to compare ourselves with the men who are around us ! We are in great danger of being unconscious of the sins that are common to the circles in which we live and the generation with which we have grown up. Our sins assume popular forms and ramifications. No more striking illustration of what the naturalists call the "law of protective colouring" can be found than that which presents itself in the realm of ethics. You know what that law is. The arctic fox, it is said, assumes a white fur in the winter months, so that it may pass undetected over the snows. When the spring comes, and the brown earth reappears, it sheds these white hairs and assumes a fur the colour of the earth over which it moves. Many fishes have markings that resemble the sand or gravel above which they make their haunts. You may watch for hours, and till they move you are unable to recognise their presence. The bird that broods on an exposed nest is never gaily coloured. However bright the plumage of its mate, it is always attired in feathers that match its surroundings, if it has to fulfil these dangerous domestic duties. Large numbers of insects are so tinted as to be scarcely distinguishable from the leaves and flowers amidst which they live. One insect has the power of assuming the appearance of a dried twig. And is there **not** something very much like this in the sphere of human conduct ! Our sins blend with the idiosyncrasies of the age and disguise themselves. Of course we do not sin in loud, flashing colours, if we make any pretension to piety at least. Our sins always perfectly compose with the background of our surroundings. As a rule, they are sins into which we fall in common with men we esteem, men who have established a hold upon our affections, men whose sagacity we trust, and who by their excellence in some things lead us to think very lightly of the moral errors they illustrate in other things. Oh, the blinding tendency of this judgment by popular standards to which we are so prone !

All this was sure to be illustrated in the history of the Psalmist. In the rough and tumble of his wandering life and coarse associations he would be prone to forget the inner and more delicate meanings and obligations of the law. The moral atmosphere pervading the Cave of Adullam was not more wholesome than that pervading our unreformed bankruptcy courts. The cave was not the best possible place in which to school a man in the finer shades

of right and wrong. Most of David's sins in after life seem to have been lurid reflections of the brutality, the unthinking ruthlessness, the impetuous animalisms of his former companions in arms. He evidently felt the danger he was in of falling to the level of his surroundings and of forgetting by how much he had fallen. Let us beware of gliding into an unconfessed habit of testing ourselves by human standards, when God has given to us higher and holier standards by which to measure ourselves. In view of the fact that sins may remain hidden from us because they are in fashion with our generation, sins that the current opinion about us never brands with strong disapproval, sins into which people sometimes fall whom we in our fond partiality regard as almost immaculate, let us pray with unfailing earnestness for daily deliverance from secret fault.

Our sins are sometimes secret from us because we are *blinded by passion, prejudice, ambition*. The circumstances of David's history were peculiarly favourable to the growth of strong passion, active prejudice, ambition of overmastering power. Singled out whilst yet a shepherd boy for the kingship by the highest religious authority of the land, favoured by a rare fortune in all the perilous enterprises upon which he entered, celebrated in the songs and dances of fair Hebrew maidens, commanding without effort an unhesitating allegiance from the shaggiest vagrants who had joined his cause, the chosen idol of a band whose swords were ever ready to flash forth against fearful odds to fulfil his most trivial desires, and with a programme of conquest before him consecrated by the dreams of twenty generations of forefathers, what wonder if he had brushed aside small scruples and in the intoxication of power had come to disregard all but the most obvious moralities! It would have scarcely surprised us had he come to look upon himself from the flattering standpoint of the fair Hebrew maidens and the hot-blooded comrades who gathered round him in a devotion that was little less than idolatrous, rather than from the severe and unflattering standpoint of Him who "encompassed him in all his ways, and understood his thoughts afar off." He must have been often tempted to regard himself as the peerless hero, rather than as the erring mortal, and to invest with a false sacredness those uprising caprices for the gratification of which so many were ready to imperil their lives. The Psalmist was swept along by great passions. The influences that surrounded him were apt to lead him into prejudice and onesidedness. It was no easy task to keep the spirit of a devouring ambition out of such a life. This

prayer for deliverance from secret fault shows how fearful the Psalmist was of falling into partial blindness to his own frailties, and how wisely jealous he was over all the issues of his heart.

And the same causes bring obscurity into our moral vision. We all have our ambitions, ambitions for fame or power or possessions, ambitions that sometimes blind us to delicate questions of duty. We have our prejudices, prejudices of race, position, culture, politics, and even religion, prejudices that may so master us that we shall become harsh, unjust, unequal in judgment, whilst we flatter ourselves that we are the most impartial people under the sun. We all have our passions, not necessarily of the animal order, passions that sweep us on with such whirlwind vehemence that we forget the sacredness of a thousand little claims that our neighbours may have upon our thought and consideration, and grow insensible to those spiritual leadings that wait about our path at every point. When great passionate forces hurry us on, we are not more apt to see the shortcomings and specks of corruption in the motives and actions of the passing moment, than the traveller by a racing express to see the little ring of decay in the lily of the wayside garden past which he is flying.

During the Franco-Prussian war, a regiment of Prussian soldiers was deploying from the shelter of a wood, in full face of French fire. The appearance of the regiment, as seen from a distance, said one of the war correspondents, was like that of some dark serpent creeping out from beneath the wood. The far-stretching figure seemed to leave a dark trail in its path. The correspondent looked carefully through his glass, and this trail resolved itself under close inspection into patches of soldiers who had fallen under French fire. Some of them were seen to get on to their feet, stagger on a few paces, and fall again. The passion of battle was upon them, and they were scarcely conscious of their wounds. And is it not thus with us? We are intoxicated by the passion of life's battle, the battle for bread and place and power and conquest of every kind; and we stagger on unconscious of the fact that we are pierced with many a hidden wound. The excitements that are in the air whirl us along, and we are all but insensible to the moral disaster. He sees who watches the battle from afar. Our slowness to recognise the hurt that has overtaken us may be the sign that the pulse of vitality is fluttering itself out.

"But why should God reckon with us for our secret sins? Do we not pass by the unwitting offences of childhood? and are we more gracious and indulgent than the one good and perfect

Father? God reckons with us for these secret faults to justify Himself in the chastisements that He in His wisdom thinks fit to impose upon us. We may sometimes seem to be as blameless as Job in matters of outward obedience ; but mysterious chastisements come to remind us of a subtler realm of fault and imperfection the knowledge of which is only just coming to us. We need to be taught that character at best is in a very rudimentary stage. We have not risen to the full measure of obligation. God's character is making a higher demand upon us than has ever yet been made by the written law. New and nobler demands burst upon us through each successive stage of our progress. In view of these new demands new light falls upon the past, and we recognise that it is full of obliquities we are only just beginning to discover.

And God reckons with us for these secret faults, not only to stimulate us to a more enlightened watchfulness over ourselves, but to remind us that we owe a great deal more to His forgiving love than we know or can ever know. We cannot measure by the knowledge we have of our outward transgressions that more abundant compassion which has blotted them out. It has blotted out indefinitely more than we imagine. It puts into the depths of the sea the few sins we manage to count and confess, as well as the yet greater sum of sin that we fail to count. That lesson, it seems to me, is present in one of the most beautiful and suggestive of Christ's earthly acts. When He took unconscious infancy into His arms and blessed it, in that unopened life there were evil aptitudes, ungrown seeds of error and evil, latent potentialities of wrong under the most winsome smiles. The blessing took away the guilt of childhood's unconscious sin, at least till the full term of intelligence and moral responsibility should have come. And in the nature of every one of us is there not a realm of half-conscious childhood with its ramifications of inadvertency and unconscious transgression? This childhood of imperfectly-developed consciousness is in Christ's arms, if it be placed there by daily acts of faith, and the secret fault is cleansed by the Divine compassion which accepts the keeping and undertakes the salvation of the spirit entrusted to its care. If our contaminations go deeper than we know, the purifying grace of God goes deeper still.

Utilitarianism only admits sin where an injury has been inflicted that can be measured in terms of the senses. Nothing can be morally bad that does not conflict with the visible interests of the community. That which is secret in its influence and immaterial in its effects is not sin. Revealed religion calls some

things sins that are hidden even from ourselves, for the relation between thought and life is inscrutable. We cannot say just where an injury to mankind begins. Sin in its dim inception is a microscopic spore, and we must be content to call the half-formed thoughts and undefined impulses sin, which are unlike Him who is both Love and Light.

It is said that all organic germs cease a few miles out at sea. Air taken from the streets or the warehouses of the city yields large numbers of these germs. The air circulating through the ship in dock is charged with them. After the shore has been left behind, the air taken from the deck is pure, but they are still found in air taken from the hold. After a few days at sea the air on deck and in the hold alike yields no trace of these microscopic spores that are closely connected with disease. Let us be ever breathing the spirit of God's love. Let us get away from the din and dust and turmoil of life, out upon that infinite sea of love that is without length or breadth or depth, and our secret faults will vanish away, and we shall by-and-by stand without offence in the presence of God's glory.

"Keep back Thy servant also from presumptuous sin." It is restraint, not purification, from presumptuous sin that the Psalmist asks in the second portion of his prayer. Presumptuous sin has no place in a true child of God. "He that is born of God doth not commit sin." Cleansed by the forgiving grace of God, we ought to need only deliverance from errors of inadvertence and infirmity. "He that is bathed needeth not save to wash his feet." No hallowing process, however complete, can remove susceptibility to the temptation even to presumptuous sins. The work of cleansing from secret fault sometimes creates a new peril, against which we must be guarded, for light has come that will make many sins that were once secret, presumptuous sins. We need to have the great restraining hand of God laid upon us every moment. Mark the vaster passion which animates the sin against knowledge. We need to be kept back from it, as the restive horse needs the curb. In the destiny to which David had been designated, in the intoxication of unprecedented success, in the chances against Saul that fortune seemed to have put into his hand, in the absoluteness of that political power he came by-and-by to wield, David may have recognised so many temptations to presumptuous sin. "Then shall I be upright," "cleansed from secret fault," and "innocent from the great transgression," "kept back from presumptuous sin."

VIII.

RELIGIOUS NEARSIGHTEDNESS.

"He that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins."—2 *Pet.* i. 9.

THE man to whom these grave defects are imputed is supposed to possess an elementary degree of faith, and to have once felt the purifying power of God in his dark and guilty spirit. He has received into himself the graft of a Divine life, but through some unhealthy condition of the stock that life has not become active, pulsating, fruitful. The life can only reach the true measure of its excellence through earnest self-cultivation. We too often allow ourselves to think that the positive transgression of some moral precept is the only peril that can threaten God's people. The New Testament however tells us that the lack of certain essential graces may make a wreck of our religious manhood. It may reduce us to the condition of the man who has not the healthy, unerring vision that will keep him out of disaster, and whose intellectual powers have become so deranged, that the cardinal events of the past have been forgotten. If our characters illustrate the negation of the qualities enumerated in the chapter before us, if there is insipidity where there should be vital virtue, if there is ignorance where there should be knowledge, if there is unregulated impulse where there should be temperance, if there is peevishness where there should be patience, if there is impiety where there should be godliness, fractiousness where there should be brotherly kindness, the hatreds of clannishness, cliquery, spurious patriotism where there should be catholic and cosmopolitan charity : these things will stamp us as the possessors of an aborted and arrested spiritual life, if indeed we possess any life at all. In the spiritual world there are wasted seeds, stunted developments, half-grown and blighted blossoms, no less than in the natural world. This

disastrous turning back of God's spring in our hearts starts in our own neglect ; for you will observe, after faith has been implanted by the power of God, these qualities must be achieved through the diligent exercise and cultivation of the faith He has given.

To know what these deficiencies that maim a man's religious life are, we must turn back to the category of qualities needing cultivation that Peter gives us. "Besides all this." In addition to the vast and priceless promises that have been given, and that by the grace of the Spirit in our hearts have issued in the awakening of faith. "Giving all diligence, in your faith supply virtue." That faith may be brought to bear its perfect fruit of virtue and strength, we must cultivate all the ethical branches of the faith that had been divinely implanted within us. There is no true beginning for us before the beginning of faith, and that must be created within us by the very power of God. To tell a man to begin his spiritual culture before he has come into the possession of a divinely quickened faith would be just like telling the farmer to sow his fields with pebbles from the river bed, or telling the nurseryman to commence his work by planting his land with sprays of coral or spikes of stalactite. The apostle starts with faith, because there is no living and acceptable spiritual grace or energy before that. The geologist might as well search for forms of life below the level of the granite, as the theologian direct attention to the Christian qualities that begin before faith begins. Life starts here, and it is in the diligent exercise of faith that virtue arises and all the fair procession of graces that follow it. Do we not however say sometimes that the religious life not only begins but also ends in faith? So it does ; just as when you go to London, if you get into a through carriage, your journey begins and ends in the same compartment. But the compartment rolls through many belts of varying country before you step out of it into the streets of London. And so, though all religious life begins and ends in faith, the faith moves in the meantime through a very wide range of virtues. All these successive virtues spring the one out of the other, and all out of faith, as the successive stories in a belfry, or the convolutions of steps winding up to some lofty monument, spring out of each other, and all rest together upon the foundation.

"In your faith supply virtue." Here man's part in the cultivation of religion begins. Virtue implies the tone and strength of religious life. This word is used in Greek literature to describe the quality that gave prowess to the hero, medicinal properties to the spring, the distinctive chemistry to each order of plants. All

spiritual life must have in it a mystic tone, strength, vigour, competence. This unseen force is described as virtue. Religion must not be suffered to sink into a dreamy, inoperative spiritual sentiment. It lies within ourselves to determine whether the faith we have received shall by strenuous exercise give worth, potency, effectiveness in every direction to our touch, character, and influence, or whether our faith shall remain the languid, inarticulate breath of an undeveloped life only. "In your faith add virtue." Where this high vitality is wanting,—the quality that makes heroism and forcefulness in the spiritual sphere, there is more or less of shortsightedness and shameful oblivion.

"And in your virtue supply knowledge." We sometimes meet with the development of religious tone, strength, or "virtue," as the apostle here describes it, where there is the conspicuous absence of knowledge. Force, moral energy, the high impulse issuing from a new-born faith arise in the character, but at that point the sudden arrest comes. Through the lack of clear, delicate discriminations, the spiritual life misses its highest possibilities of success, if it does not come to wreck itself altogether. There is a very imperfect understanding of the Divine will and Divine truth in its deepest relations, and of the conditions under which that truth must be brought to bear upon the different classes of mankind. Religious life that has virtue without knowledge is on pretty much the same level as aerial navigation. The balloon may be made to rise into the pathway of forces that will sweep it on with unapproachable speed, but there is no known apparatus by which its course can be accurately directed. Delicate regulating power from within is wanted. So with the character to which virtue has been added without the further complement of knowledge. The lack always makes void much of the grace of the past.

"And in knowledge supply temperance" or self-restraint. Strength of character must never make us reckless. Knowledge must never puff up. If that knowledge consists in the true discrimination of God's will, the exercise of it will bring perfect control of all the senses and appetites. Every movement of flesh and blood must be kept in perfect rein. True Christian strength is not shown in furious tilting against worldliness and unregeneracy, but in masterly self-government. There is a quixotic type of religion which is the unmistakable sign of crudeness and imperfection. We are called to perfect control of the appetites, perfect control of the tongue, exquisite self-possession in the presence of provocation. A river is usually an unmixed blessing to a country. It fertilizes

adjacent lands. It presents a matchless highway for commerce. But there are exceptions to the rule. One of the largest rivers in the world is known by the name of "China's sorrow." The banks through which the Yellow River flows for nearly a thousand miles of its course are so low and so friable, that, with the first flush of the spring floods, away they sink, and thousands of square miles of country are laid under water. It is not hemmed in by granite or limestone gorges like its great and incomparably useful neighbour the Yang Tze. Its torrents are unrestrained. Within historical times it has shifted its course altogether, and discharges itself into the sea some hundreds of miles away from the old mouth. Although a river of first-class dimensions, counted by the volume of water it discharges, for nearly a thousand miles of its course it is scarcely navigable. It is a colossal power for good wasted through the lack of strong, binding power in its banks. And there are not a few people who are like this capricious river in the career they follow. We might perhaps describe them as "the Church's sorrow." There is uncommon virtue or potency in their characters, and they are not altogether wanting in knowledge. But through the lack of this temperance or "self-restraint" they break out at given periods like "China's sorrow," and make schism and faction in the Church, and fritter away their own capacity for usefulness, and possibly in the end shift their course into altogether unexpected channels. To "virtue" and "knowledge" they have failed to add "temperance," and their very religion is maimed and halt and blind.

And this quality of "temperance" or "self-restraint" has another side to it. Not only must there be that strict mastery of our own appetites implied in "temperance," but we must learn to show meekness, fortitude, resignation in the midst of suffering. Our temperance must be united with "patience." Under the crosses, disappointments, and sufferings of our Daily life there must be steadfastness and untroubled hope. We must never take it upon ourselves to cut knots. Some people possess all the virtues but the passive virtues. They are patterns of reason and good temper when the lines fall to them in pleasant places. Under a bright sky they abound in vigorous, beneficent activities. But let something cut them to the quick, and they become as surly and impetuous and repineful, and possibly as unbelieving, as human nature before it has been touched by the grace of God. You might almost take them for specimens of the old wilderness murderers risen from the dead. Let us remember that "patience" under suffering is as necessary to the perfection of the Christian

character as common honesty to its rudimentary stage. Some people can suffer more cheerfully than others by nature, but times of trial will come to us, when we shall be called to show a type of patience that can only arise from the exercise and cultivation of the self-conquering faith, the germ of which God has put within all His forgiven people. Murmuring and petulance are symptoms of subtle spiritual disease. Where "patience" is wanting you have a maimed and a half-blind religion only.

"And in your patience supply godliness." Our resignation to the cross-influences of our life must not begin and end in stoicism. The end of man's education is not to teach him to close his lips against the rising cry, and to maintain an unwrinkled face in the midst of pain. It would be a very poor end to all our tribulations, if they ossified our sensibilities and qualified us for the defiance of pain. God's servants are made to cultivate patience, that they may come to a larger knowledge of God, and a clearer and more reverent and abiding sense of His presence. An impatient man is just as much shut out from a vivid and enduring experience of God as a heathen man and an idolater. Patience is the basis of both human and Divine knowledge. The crosses, sufferings, provocations of life, accomplishing as they do the perfect work of patience within us, temper our natures to the quick perception of God's presence and active sympathy with all His will and law. We are mistaken if we think of godliness as one of the elementary graces of religion. Unless there be in us reverence, submission, uniform sensibility to God, our religion is maimed and shattered.

And then to the temper we cherish towards God there must be joined a right attitude of mind towards our fellow-believers. "In your godliness supply brotherly kindness." We are often told now-a-days that morality is independent of religion, and that a man can cultivate the purest love to his fellows without having any faith in God, or any sense of His grace and presence. You may get a bit of humanity here and there in an ungodly man, but it can only reach its true fulness and perfection in the devout and believing soul. I have seen grains sprouting that have been lodged in the crevices of a city wall; but the world would be ill-off for bread, if it were to trust to harvests of that sort. You can only get the highest and most fruitful forms of brotherly kindness out of the soil of a rich and expansive godliness. We have very often to learn to love the brother who has been begotten of God, by the process of our own love to God. But the two things must co-exist. It will avail us little to cherish a right attitude of mind towards God. un-

less we cherish a right attitude of mind towards those who are united with us in the same fellowship of faith. There can be no clear, mature, spiritual life where there is bitterness, schism, heart-burning amongst those who are of the same household of faith. Indeed, we cannot be dutiful towards God without being at the same time tender-hearted towards each other. The full development of godliness will lead on to "brotherly kindness."

And to "brotherly kindness" there must be joined a world-embracing charity ; that is, universal love towards all men as well as to the fellow-believer. The love we find it possible to cherish to those who are God's people should strengthen and inspire us for the love of those who are not God's people. Through the development of every branch of faith, brotherly kindness must expand into universal compassion. There are some people who can only love the members of their own Church, or race, or political club, or social coterie. If the truth were known, some of us would be found doing a great deal of secret excommunication in our hearts. Narrow tempers are inconsistent with religious life. A true faith will always bring with it, if duly cherished, a generous breadth. From godliness brotherly kindness will develop itself, and from brotherly kindness the crown of all religious faith and life, universal love. Where there is the lack of this you have religious defect, limitation, shortsightedness.

Let us just glance at these qualities again, and see how each quality connects itself with some important part of man's nature. "To faith add virtue." Virtue, or inward strength, connects itself with the will, for it is through the will it works. That is the first thing God claims for Himself in His purifying work of grace. The *will* is the mainspring of all man's spiritual movement, and needs to be energised. "To virtue knowledge." It is through all the channels of the *intellectual life* that knowledge is received and treasured. When God washes a man from the defilements of the past, He demands the consecration of intelligence to His service. "And to knowledge temperance." Temperance is concerned with the government of the *passions* ; and God, in cleansing a man from his past pollutions, seeks the subjection of well-ruled passions to His service. "To temperance patience." Patience connects itself with the *sensibilities*, through which we are made to suffer. In cleansing a man, God seeks the after-harmony of all his sensibilities with the Divine will. "And to patience godliness." In separating a man from evil, God seeks for the response of all the *religious faculties* to His operations. "And to godliness brotherly kindness

and charity." These qualities link themselves with the sphere of the *affections*. In cleansing a man from his old sins, God seeks to bring about the healthy exercise and benevolent direction of his affections. The whole range of man's powers is indirectly specified, the powers through which a man enters into relationship with his fellow-men, as well as the powers through which he knows God and enters into relationship with the Eternal. God cleanses a man, to make him holy in all these relationships, holy by the putting on of all these high graces. Wherever these virtues exist in their integrity, the whole field of a man's nature has been brought under cultivation, and the man has become fruitful to the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Wherever these things are wanting, the man, in spite of his elementary faith, is half blind. He cannot discern the far-reaching purpose and significance of the grace that has begun to work within him. He has forgotten the sacred lesson of his first purification from sin.

Before passing on to notice what Peter says about the lack of these things, let us glance for a moment at what he says about their possession.

"For if these things are yours and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful unto the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." An imputed possession of these excellences will give us no high place in the scale of spiritual being. The stunted, spasmodic possession of these graces will not ennoble us very much more than the mere fiction of an imputed possession. These things are in some people, as rare plants are in particular sections of country. You may come across them if you are very lucky and search long enough. A true believer's life should be as full of them as the banks and hedgerows of mid-May are full of the glint and perfume of flowers. Faith oftentimes lies dormant, like hibernating insects. A book of Chinese fables tells of a country where the people wake once in fifty days, and take the dreams of their sleep for realities, and the things they see in their waking moments for dreams. The imaginative author might have been describing some believing Christians. The power of innate faith rarely breaks out into moral movement. Now faith is not a fruit-bearing stock, but so much dead lumber within us, unless it lead by the way of these practical graces up to the perfect knowledge of Jesus Christ. That is to be the grand issue of all these excellences. The end has not been reached when they have regulated our present life and beautified our present relationships. We have not done with these virtues when we have cultivated them. It is

through these things that we come to know Christ, for there can be no fellowship without knowledge. The beginning of the knowledge of Christ may come to us by reading, by reflection, by prayer ; but the perfection of that knowledge can only come to us by doing. It is in the sphere of our practical activity and service that His image is mirrored upon us without a broken line. These qualities are steps through which we rise to the full apprehension of Christ. In working out the problems set him by his instructor, the student comes to know all that enacts itself in the mind of that instructor, and to understand his special genius and character. And it is through the diligent cultivation of these things that we in the same way rise to the full apprehension of Christ. We never realize His deep interest in our moral perfections, nor appreciate the power He brings to bear for our help, till we use diligence in working out this ideal of character. It is in this way that we rise to the higher comprehension of His nature, and become fitted for a mysterious participation in all that is Divine.

The apostle describes the lack of these things, first, under the metaphor of a *grave defect in one of the leading physical senses*; and, secondly, *under the figure of a lapse in the working of the intellectual powers*.

He who is wanting in one or all of these high qualities *lacks the primary organ of perfect spiritual perception*. "He is blind." We sometimes speak as though a man who has become the subject of the converting grace of God had passed out of the reach of grave spiritual calamity. We assume that blindness is the monopoly of those who lie in the darkness of nature all their days, without spiritual quickening or enlightenment. The stagnant and unprogressive believer is blind, no less than the purely natural man who discerns not the things of the Spirit of God. Formalists and people who are not a few steps in advance of formalists too often flatter themselves with the assurance, "We see," when, according to Peter's test, they are almost as dark as the heathen. If we ourselves lack the full catholic range of Christian virtues, and are indifferent to their cultivation, we shall necessarily be blind to their supreme realization in the pattern and personality of Jesus Christ. We shall be incapable of feeling the true fascination of His matchless character. The vision of His spiritual symmetries and perfections will fail to thrill us. His purpose will be hidden from us. We shall have no apprehension of the high place here and hereafter, for which it is His purpose to qualify us by the possession of these excellences. Our trust in Christ will be trust

that begins and ends in a spasm of servile fear. His strange loveliness will be hidden from us. Lacking a full-orbed and a Christ-like character, we shall lack true knowledge of Christ and His work and purpose. "He is blind."

How many of us have inadequate views of what salvation means! Some people see nothing in salvation but deliverance from wrath and tempest and everlasting fire. A miserably defective view that is! If a man were to come back from a fire, and say he had seen half a dozen children plucked out of the burning house, and now he understood the mystery of life and the end of all human problems, you would call that man a prodigy of ignorance and emptiness. To bring the children down the crackling staircase, and place them in circumstances of safety, is only a beginning of life. The purpose of human life does not end with the rescue from the fire, otherwise no more zeal need be shown in the rescue of children than in the rescue of a cage of canaries. If the man is to do a tithe of what he claims, he must follow the children to school whenever they are sent back to school, and study the relation of the ideas that are put into the mind to the nature of each child, and the career for which it is being fitted. He must follow the children out into their future pathways of life, and see the relationships they are to form and the impression they are to make upon the world. He will perhaps have to watch the moulding influence of their ideas upon future society, after they have passed from the present life. The man is blind to the true greatness of human nature, if he can look no farther than the fire. And so with the man who sees in the process of redemption little more than the snatching of a soul from consuming wrath. We must learn to see into the purpose of the training, instruction, and boundless development of the saved life. God does not save us to put us on to some secure level of moral mediocrity and to leave us here, but to bring us into fellowship with Himself.

A shipwrecked sailor has been helped by a timely hand on to a raft or floating spar. He has not been put there that he may live on a keg of rain-water and a cask of sea biscuits, and spend the rest of his days on a few square feet of planking. That is but a passing means to a larger and a better end. If you watched him drifting on the raft, and saw that he made no effort to secure the larger and better end, you would say he was either blinded by the sea-spray, struck by the lightning of the storm, or driven insane by his misfortunes. He drifts close under the beeting cliffs. Now he is within an arm's length of some fissure in the cliffs.

Through that fissure, rock-cut steps lead up and out into a land of springs, and cornfields and orchards, and noble cities, and breadths of summer sunshine, and all the precious fellowships of men. He drifts away, as though it were his will to live and die on the raft. Voices call to him from the shore, but he seems careless of the benign destiny to whose threshold he has come. The man you would say, is blind. So with those of us who, saved by the forgiving grace of God, neglect to enter into that region of privilege and fellowship and ennobling spiritual experience to which virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, charity are the successive steps for the loyal and believing soul. "He that lacketh these things is blind."

And now Peter softens the expression and substitutes a somewhat milder term. *At best the blindness is half-blindness.* If the man who neglects the cultivation of these qualities is not as dark as an unregenerate man, he at least labours under a most serious disability. He suffers from spiritual myopia, for the word used in the text is precisely the same Greek word the medical man of to-day uses to describe short-sight. "He cannot see afar off." He discerns the near, but is quite at fault when he comes to deal with the distant. Foregrounds are clear, but all the backgrounds are sheer haze. The wider horizon is a chaos. The shortsighted man can see the puddle at his feet as he crosses the desert, but not the river of crystal, with belt of green, that flows for his refreshment on the far away edge of the desert. He can see the little half-withered oasis on which he rests, but not the land of corn and oil and wine that smiles its welcome from the hill tops through rifts in the sunset clouds. He can read the milestone against which he has tripped, and mark the footsteps of an ally in the sand; but he fails to see the banners that unfurl themselves for his greeting from the towers of the palace on the sky-line. And so with the unprogressive believer who is afflicted by this spiritual shortsightedness. In the absence of the knowledge to which these graces lead, he does not discern the complete character of the Benefactor who has washed and purified him; nor does he discern the heavenly ideal to which the washing and the purification were to point his aspirations and direct his footsteps. He sees perhaps a little of what God converts from, but scarcely anything of what God converts to. He has but a blurred discernment of the broader meanings and profounder depths of his fellowship with the Father of lights. He has no perception of the largeness of his own destiny.

Again, St. Peter describes the lack of these higher Christian

excellences under the figure of *an intellectual lapse*. "Having forgotten the cleansing from his old sin."

The worth of a conversion may be lost through imperfect recollection. A bad memory is a very inconvenient, and sometimes a very expensive thing. It may cost the student the place of honour for which he has been working for years. It may cost the business man an order, or a commercial connexion, that might have led on to wealth and fortune. It may cost a man a friendship that has been the dream of his life. Sometimes the joy of home, the essence of tenderness, the soul of all affection, is undermined by this lapse. An injury to the brain comes, and the life that had been bound together by golden links of memory into consistent faithfulness and affection, becomes a painful phantasm of incongruous and disjointed impressions. Mutual recognition between those who are flesh of each other's flesh, all the fidelities of kinship, all the sanctities of home, turn upon the strength and clearness of this particular faculty. Where there is no recognition there cannot be friendship, communion, or love. The nearest ties borrow their strength from this source. The wreck of memory brings disaster into the home, and changes it into a mere Bedlam.

And it is so emphatically in the sphere of religious things. The bad memory works far more moral disaster than it can possibly work in inferior spheres of life. The very bases of all high and holy relationship to God, and of all noble spiritual possibilities, are lost when a man forgets that he was purged from his old sin, and illustrates the forgetfulness in the neglect of these high excellences of character.

Unless there be the successful cultivation of all high Christian qualities, the Divine purpose of the first gracious act of purification has been overlooked. God did not wash the believer from the defilements of the past to make him a shade more respectable only, and then to leave him for the rest of his days at the standpoint of his first purification.

When some Lady Bountiful takes pity on a gutter child, and washes it from its nauseous accumulations of filth, it is that having put it into better clothes, she may introduce it to a more genial and generous life. If the child begins to dress itself in its old rags and patches, or stands shivering in the cold, neglecting to wrap itself about in the better raiment that has been made ready for it, it is because the child has forgotten, if it ever understood, the purpose for which the Lady Bountiful took it from the streets and washed it. She wanted to make it her own, and give it a place on her

hearth and at her table. God washed us from the guilt and contamination of the past, not that we might stand lounging for ever at the starting-point of our first faith, or possibly go back to our old defilements, but that we might put on Christ, and be clothed in these excellences that are summed up in the glorious character of Christ, and stand in His presence, chosen friends and companions for ever.

You may have sometimes walked through the woods in the winter or early spring. All the dead and rotting leaves of the last autumn have disappeared from the living trees. The traceries of branch and twig stand clean and clear against the sky, as if they had been etched with the finest needle. But you notice a tree, one half of which has been struck dead with the lightning, or branches that have been snapped off by the storm and lie prostrate on the earth. Here all the slimy, decaying leaves lie in the positions in which they grew. Scarcely one of them has fallen. How is that? There is no life there. In the branches that are still joined to their parent stems, the pulses of the coming life long since pushed away the rotting foliage of the past. The expansion of the hidden life has thrust away the dead and the old and the impure, to make room for the green leaf and sweet blossom that have come to their birth. And so the life of God came into us pushing off the impurities and contaminations and dead works of the past, in order that the way might be prepared for the new and better life of virtue, knowledge, temperance, godliness, brotherly kindness, charity. If the new life is not delighting the eye with its inimitable grace, and filling the air with its reviving freshness, it is because there has been some untimely and disastrous arrest. The past cleansing and its Divine motive of perfect life and attainment have been overlooked and forgotten.

These words imply that *the memory of past grace will be a living and effectual inspiration to us at each successive step of our perfecting*. When God first touches our spirits with His cleansing power, that act has in it the potentiality of complete Christian excellence. But it must be kept in fresh and grateful remembrance. A man can only be stimulated by the experiences and associations of the past, whilst they remain within the range of his knowledge, recollection, consciousness. Memory is the instrument by which we utilize the forces of the past. A man may have a fortune in his pocket, and yet if he has forgotten the fact, he may find as much difficulty in transacting his business and getting back to his home as the man who is penniless. The motive power implanted within

us at our first separation from evil by the gracious act of God must be kept in view, or these noble spiritual altitudes will never be reached. The bad memory will bring disaster, frustration, incapability. The first cleansing act is infinitely pregnant and suggestive. It carries with it a power to transform all the after life. The embryonic force of complete and unspotted holiness hides itself in the first movement of the forgiven and regenerated life. Do not let us disparage the worth of the first conversion. "He that is born of God doth not commit sin." If we are not unblamably holy, it is not so much because we have failed to attain "the second blessing," as because we have forgotten the first. An unbroken and ever grateful remembrance of the love God showed to us when He first saved us will inspire us to meet the loftiest demands of our Christian life and obligation. "He that lacketh these things hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins."

The sustained remembrance of your conversion will keep fresh and forceful the motive that will stimulate you to the attainment of these various moral and spiritual excellences. You might as well try to grow a cedar tree without roots, as seek to cultivate these qualities without the peculiar type of motive supplied by the act of God's gracious cleansing from sin. Let the miracle of purifying grace be kept in view, and you will have the motive that will lead to the development of spiritual force and valour. You can have nothing but weakness, insipidity, cowardice, where there is no sense of God's gracious sin-cleansing love and activity. Let the purifying act be kept in view, and you will have the motive that will carry you on to the noblest attainments of Christian knowledge. God's cleansing grace is not only a grace that touches the heart and the life, but that purifies also the inward vision. Let that first factor of religious experience be kept in view, and you will have the motive that will lead to the most perfect temperance and self-government. Let the inspiration of this first grace be cherished, and you have a power that will keep a man patient under the most cruel suffering and wrong. Let that glorious crisis in your spiritual history be always present to the mind, and you will incline to God, and yield allegiance to His will, and respond to all the influences of His presence as instinctively as some climbing plants follow the sun. It is the recollection of this Divine act within which supplies the essential material of all true godliness. Let the old grace be kept in view, and you shall find a love diffusing itself within, which will make you perfectly brotherly towards your fellow believer, and impel to a large-souled charity to the race. In the adequate

realization of what the mercy is that washed you from your old defilements, you have the life and motive and sustaining power of all coming perfection. All imperfection has its root in ingratitude and indifference to past grace. "He hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins."

I remember going out some years ago, on the Appian Way at Rome, towards the hour of sunset. The tombs of ancient soldiers and statesmen were around me on every side. The object however that most impressed my imagination was the half-ruined aqueduct that had once brought sweet lakes and rivers from the Alban and Sabine mountains twenty or thirty miles away, to replenish the baths, and feed the fountains, and cool the hot streets of ancient Rome. The fine symmetrical arches were falling into ruin. A breach in a single arch of those aqueducts was enough to cut off the crystal current that had once come down from the far-off hills. The fountains of Tivoli might gush with the old affluence, but these ruinous interruptions had come, and the waters could no longer find their way to the city by the old channel. Across the road, the great plain stretched out to the sea, and as the sun sank slowly to the west, and shed over the vast expanse the mournful gorgeousness of its setting the deadly miasma began to rise from the plain on the one side, and enshroud both distant city and the lines of magnificent arches, stretching out towards the hills.

In the far-away life of your youth, purifying streams from on high were welling through your soul. A sweet and reviving power of forgiveness came day by day into your being, separating you from the offences of your childhood and your youth. Through virtue and knowledge and temperance and godliness and charity, the purifying power should have been led on into all your after destiny. But there came the breach in the stretch of arches. Grace was not added to grace. The character you might have achieved had gaps and breakdowns in it. And now perhaps the sun nears its setting. The mists of worldliness and spiritual death begin to wreath themselves about your spirit. You are cut off from the forgiven and purified experiences of your youth and manhood. Lacking these things, you have forgotten that you were once cleansed. Seek with diligence for the renewed power of that cleansing in your daily life.

IX.

DOCTRINAL FICKLENESS.

"That we henceforth be no more children tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine."—*Eph.* iv. 14.

MOST of the apostolic epistles combat some special heresy that endangered the Churches to which they were addressed. No special heresy is attacked in the epistle before us, because at the time when it was penned perhaps no one heresy had struck very much deeper root than another. The text before us however would seem to imply that the faith of these Ephesian believers was more or less checked in its development by surrounding influences. Ephesus was a great meeting-place of diverse religions and diverse philosophies, and we can picture its newly founded Church as sensitive in some degree to their contending currents. A specious electricism may waste away the vigour of a Church's faith just as woefully as a defined and over-mastering error may shatter it. In these verses the apostle points out that a Divine and effectual provision has been made for our edification in the faith, and that this provision is designed to take us beyond that stage of childish vacillation in which faith ebbs and flows with all the changes of our surroundings. And Christ gave some apostles, and some prophets, to ripen us through their diverse unctions into rich and holy and perfect manhood, and as a preliminary step to this, "that we shall be no more children."

The topics here brought before us are the Impediments, the Conditions, and the Standard of Christian growth.

I. *The apostle suggests to us a grave impediment to religious growth.* "That we henceforth be no more children."

These words perhaps carry our thought to the fickleness that characterized these converts in their heathen state. That fickleness was to be abolished from the daily life, through the gifts

Christ imparted to His appointed witnesses and heralds in the Church. The apostle writes under a significant fear lest the doctrinal fickleness of the heathen days should recur in the earlier stages of religious faith, and retard the desired edification into Christ's fulness. Possibly distinct symptoms of this fickleness were present to his view, as he pointed out how foreign this was to the dispensation of the Spirit, and how ample and adequate was the antidote already provided. Indeed our text breaks upon us after the triumphant strain of the preceding verse almost with the jar of an anticlimax, and nothing but some urgent practical emergency in the life of the Church at Ephesus can explain its insertion. We feel that the apostle had distinct illustrations of this inconstancy before him. He not only surmised from past observation, but knew by direct report that the Ephesian believers were unhealthily sensitive to the influences of their times. Their faith was apt to rise and fall with the trade-cries of the shrine-makers and the bombast of the magicians who used curious books and the jargon of the wandering philosophers from Bagdad or Alexandria, almost as perceptibly as the faith of not a few people rises and falls now-a-days with the annual session of a scientific congress or the fresh issue of some review that assumes the speedy disappearance of all supernatural religion. We are not told whether they had made the discovery that vacillating belief was a badge of intellectual distinction, but the apostle at least felt it necessary to intimate that distracted faith was neither a thing calculated to command very much respect in itself, nor the state to which Christ had exactly destined them in His primitive Church appointments.

1. The words before us imply that *doctrinal fickleness is inconsistent with advanced religious life*. It is the symptom of childishness, a state that must be outgrown before the standard of Christ can be in any sense reached.

We smile at the tastes of those eccentric orientals who have brought themselves to admire a cramped foot and tottering gait in their women, and yet there is a sphere in which some of us show a taste as perverted as that. We praise faith in proportion to the crippled daintiness of its foothold and the diameter of the oscillations it describes in its clumsy effort at progress. We accord quite an apotheosis to intellectual indecision, and crown with extravagant honours what Paul unhesitatingly damned. With some people, doctrinal fickleness is the fashionable trick that stamps a man a member of the higher coteries of culture. We accept it as a certificate of superiority. "What tenderer or more

holy life has our world seen in these modern times than the life of such a man? and had he not reservations about dogmas the Church has regarded of saving importance? What soul of nobler or more heroic mould than that of such a thinker? and yet he passed years of agitating alternations between vital verities and their negations." All that may be granted, and yet it may be difficult to see any connexion between tender, noble, and heroic characters and intellectual changefulness. Doubts may have made these men more moving subjects for biographies. The heart cannot but be touched by the pathetic spectacle of a faith persistent through doubts and failings of heart and frequent despairs. But it may be questioned whether these men were more active benefactors of their race and truer servants of God for their intellectual unrest. If your aim is to grow up into the pathetic subject of a portraiture rather than into that active and undistracted service of God and your kind which is the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ, perhaps a frequent rediscussion of your creed and chronic intellectual unrest may serve you well enough.

"We grow into men by casting off our old dogmas and following out new leadings." Are you quite sure of that? A good deal may turn upon the respective qualities of the new leadings and the old dogmas. To some minds perhaps your new leadings may occupy the position of old dogmas, and old dogmas may be new leadings. In that case, of course, we presume it is the change itself that causes growth, and the belief of one thing or another is not a matter of the slightest practical moment. Do you not see the dilemma in which you are landed? Every belief is in itself equally useful or equally useless. Strength is generated by the mere excitement of change, and not from the assimilated substance of our beliefs. That would give us a curious physiological law if translated into terms of the animal or vegetable world. A plant will thrive or a baby fatten in proportion to the pleasing varieties of temperature to which it may be subjected, or the wide range of chemical opposites that can be brought to bear in its nutrition. The change upon which growth is dependent is a new assimilation of the same elements day by day, not the application of elements diverse in nature from those already received. Christ Himself recognised the need of truths new and old in the parable of the householder who brought out of his treasury the products of past and present seasons. But He did not tell us that the new truths were to be the negations of the old. The householder was a scribe well instructed in sacred lore and no ambitious inventor.

He recognised the bond of continuity between old and new truths. The new truths like the truths from Christ's lips were to be expansions and not flippant denials of the old, a widening of the horizon of religious perception, rather than an absolute rupture with the past. True faith has its pedigree, and is no nameless interloper. In genuine scriptural wisdom, new and old are inseparably joined. You cannot, like your Master, fulfil all righteousness if you break too thoughtlessly and absolutely with the past. To shuffle about the radical elements of our belief from time to time is inevitably to stunt our growth. Some people think they are becoming wonderful giants by taking new departures in their creed every time they come across an intellectual novelty, or a time-honoured platitude indeed if its wrinkled outlines are but spangled with the latest literary braveries. Paul held that kind of thing to be sheer childishness. It is the toy ship that tosses with every little ripple crisped up by the vagrant winds, not the vessel freighted with the wealth of half a province.

A belief held in suspension, is like so much locked-up capital, or an atom in equilibrium between two counter-attractions. A merchant may be very wealthy indeed, but if he cannot realize speedily, the splendid chances of the daily markets will not yield very much more manna to his basket, or sunshine to his store, than they yield to the beggar at his gate. An atom may be a very wonderful atom indeed, but it cannot contribute much to the history of the planetary or any other system if it is imprisoned between two forces that just neutralize each other. Morality and even Christian morality may go on for a limited time when faith has lost its active function, just as Mr. Kinglake tells us, in his "History of the Crimean War," that a gallant major kept his seat in the saddle, and even brandished his sword for some few seconds after his head had been shot off; but there is no new motive for the exercise of Christian morality, and it is a wonder that the impulse of the old motive should last so long. A man is not likely to grow much after he has reached that stage. It is folly to expect character to develop up to the standard of Christ's manhood when defined faith is gone or at best is in a state of suspended animation.

A religion of open questions will be a religion of closed affections and arrested energies. "Faith worketh by love." Yet if the workman spend all his life in contemplating his work from different angles and through glasses of every conceivable focal length, and calling every impression but the last an error, the sunset will not

look in upon any very great amount of finished work, or reflect itself in well-tempered instruments bright with over-much service. Beliefs can never take hold upon our affections if this fickleness exist, any more than a neighbour can win a very deep place in our hearts about whose character we are in constant doubt. When we lay ourselves out to flirt with all views, we fritter away our capacity for sincere and fruitful attachment to any. An impression must be persistent before it can be the mainspring of unselfish acts. If your faith changes all its perceptions into phantoms at fixed intervals, and holds its new perceptions with the latent suspicion that they may ultimately come to share the same fate as the old, you will never be found, like your Master, taking up a cross to save men; and if you should chance to be seen carrying that symbol of self-denial at all, it will only be because, like Simon the Cyrenian, you have been requisitioned by a hand you could not resist.

It is my conviction, that a man's character may gain more good from downright, stable, dogmatic positivism than from a wavering and indeterminate Christianity. I will not be into Christ that he will grow up, but it will be into a manhood of some sort. The religion of human ethics gathers its strength from this, that little belief is exacted from its disciples, but that belief must be absolute and unwavering. I almost tremble to say it, but it seems to me, after deliberate reflection, that a bold and fearless sail out into the wild, agonising storm and darkness and pain of utter atheism may be a better thing for a man's soul than this constant tacking in and out between the various doctrines of the Christian faith by which too many of us are characterized. A doctrine that is an unknown quantity will profit you nothing. Better cremate all your beliefs of set purpose than let them rot away one by one and insensibly volatilize into space.

In some of the typhoons that sweep the coasts of Eastern Asia, trees that are torn up by the roots not infrequently suffer less permanent injury than trees to which no visible damage has been done. I have seen a tree, blown down after it had attained a height of ten or fifteen feet, strike a new root at the summit of the old growth, and thrive again for years. Trees, on the other hand, from which scarcely a bough has been snapped, die from the mere shock their sensitive fibres receive in the storm. I have seen men who were my contemporaries in theological study turn their backs upon the Christian ministry and become leading sceptics. The hurtling storm broke, and they were plucked up by the roots.

I am not so sure that their destiny is so sad as that of other men I know, who have retained every separate article of their creed intact, but the sensitive fibres of whose faith have been so agitated by the passing controversies, that their beliefs, whilst retaining the old logical completeness, have almost ceased to be vital and operative. When Jesus Christ was upon earth, He uttered little in denunciation of His open foes, men who were plotting against His life, or putting a price upon His blood. He reserved His denunciations for those prudent folk who held aloof from party, and would never distress themselves by going the length of a conclusion. If Christ were in our midst once more, I am not sure He would go to the halls of science and to the haunts of socialists and unbelievers, and fix His scathing glance and lay His crushing interdict upon the Footes and the Ingersolls and the Bradlaughs of our time. He would seek His foe in the minister who preaches without fixed convictions, and in the well-to-do Christian, who allows his faith to be tossed from side to side by the thoughtless and irreverential pleasantries of the club and the exchange and the social circle, and would exclaim as He exclaimed to the phlegmatic spectators of His controversy with the heated scribes at Capernaum, "He that is not with Me is against Me, and he that gathereth not for Me scattereth abroad."

"But am I never to review the grounds of my faith? Is it unlawful to give up an obsolete doctrine? Does change of creed involve a crime?" Certainly not. But change can only take place under very strict conditions if growth is to go on. There must be conscious, self-directing power in the change. If you hold a dogma that you half suspect is unsound and God-dishonouring, first take the trouble to be very sure of the fact, and then get rid of it by all means. If a dogma is to be swept out of the way, let it be by a careful process. Let its destruction be an intelligent, self-conscious, premeditated act. If a dogma is to die, let it not be condemned by secret caprice and die by mob-law. Much of the unbelief of the age, like much of its religious faith, is indeterminate, and it is from this cause that the mischief springs. It is the unbelief which is in the air, as we often hear it expressed, rather than that which comes down in honest, pelting, palpable showers, that we have to fear. Men are to be met with now-a-days who entertain doubts and parade them in society before they have swaddled them in the decencies of a syllogism. If you are to have doubts, at least take the trouble to clothe them in a careful, manly logic, before you give them a place in your life. Do not let them be

nebulous. If you are to change the articles of your faith, make a solemn sacrament of the change. It is this languid, indeterminate drifting against which the apostle protests, and which will always limit your proportions to those of babyhood, if you live to be as old as one of the patriarchs. Do not allow yourself to be a mere cockle-shell. Make a principle of your creed. Put your helm hard down, and resolve that, come what will, you will never drift. It is this wicked, indolent, will-less drifting against which the apostle cries out. Not to remind you of the constancies of the universe and the sublime immutabilities of Him who rules it, it is a crime against the dignity of your intellect, sacrilege against the holiness of your conscience, treason against the crown rights of your proper personality as a man, for you to allow yourself to drift and toss and toss and drift for years. The great religious mischief of the age comes from this dreamy drifting. I am not now denouncing particular doctrinal novelties that may be attracting adherents, but I am protesting against the evil of chronic, fortuitous, unregulated change in itself. If a more desirable haven of belief invites you, and you are sure of the soundings, by all means hoist sail and go, but do not drift. Some time ago an unbeliever said to me in the course of conversation, "I had felt my creed disintegrating for years." I thought within myself: "You had forgotten what was due to your own manhood to let the change come upon you from without after that humiliating fashion. If your creed had been false or bad, you should have cast it out wholesale and at once, by a deliberate, intelligent act. You surrendered your power of self-direction." Suppose that man were coming back into Christianity, as I trust he some day may, and were coming back after the fashion in which he went away, I would say: "Pause awhile. It will be no gain to *drift* back. It may be a secret Divine drawing that is moving you, but do not mutter an answer to that drawing from the midst of your dreams. Gather up your self-directing power. Let your belief be a moral choice, and not a process little better than pitch and toss with capricious psychological moods for dice and counters." It will do a man about as much good to drift from Atheism into Christianity, as to drift from Christianity into Atheism. Make up your mind that your creed shall undergo no changes of which you yourself are not the intelligent and responsible agent. If we could get it into our hearts that this chronic changefulness, this indeterminate drifting, is a crowning spiritual crime, half the battle against unbelief would be won.

2. The apostle traces back the diverse teaching that issues in

doctrinal inconstancy to *the loose moral conditions* of the society in which his readers lived. These winds of changing doctrine take their rise in an atmosphere of more or less thinly-veiled imposture. "By the sleight of men in craftiness after the wiles of error." A very ungenerous and cynical view of human nature, you are ready to say. Well might a modern French writer speak of St. Paul as "the nasty little Jew." It must be confessed that Christianity does not flatter human nature very much at the outset. No religion that does can ever be an educating religion. A schoolmaster would not have very remarkable results to show who commenced by telling the boys all round how brilliant and accomplished they were. A religion that starts with the flattery of human nature is an organized hypocrisy of display. One can only wonder why such a religion should feel any call for its own existence. The question whether Paul was a cynic in pronouncing this sweeping condemnation of that outside opinion which floated in upon the early Church and troubled the steady development of its life, may be looked at from more than one standpoint. Were the staring, hard-faced, impudent, hungry shrine-makers and letter venders and sophists, who jostled the half-palsied little Jew as he hurried hither and thither through the streets of Ephesus with face often wet with tears of unselfish solicitude for the souls of men, warning every one night and day for the space of three years, and never taking a denarius for his toils,—were the adventurers who jostled this man so very disinterested as to be beyond his criticism? Could he really bend in unfeigned deference to their moral superiority as he encountered the keen, busy hypocrites in the ample squares of the city, and under the colonnades of the great temple? Had the unselfish apostle no right to claim for the pervading spirit of his unselfish Master a clear field of action over the faith of his hearers, a field in which no influence bred in all that trickery and imposture had a right for one moment to breathe? The heresiarchs of that time, at least, were common dice-players. The controversies of that day started, with rare exceptions, in deliberate and ill-veiled fraud.

Of course the paganism of the first century, you will say, and not a little of its philosophy too, were mercenary and unblushing, immeasurably inferior in tone to the spirit of the system represented by Paul. That is admitted. But the leaders of present-day thought have the virtues of Christian apostles without any of their ignorance and narrowness. The influences that are unsettling your thought and mine to-day do not spring up in an atmo-

sphere of imposture. They originate with men who at least are honourable and fair-minded. Paul would never be blind cynic enough to apply such terms as "dice-playing" and "cunning craftiness" to the aims of those modern leaders who have done so much consciously or unconsciously to unsettle the mind of the Church. I am not so sure of that. I half suspect if he were writing an analytical history of the unsettlement of faith within the last quarter of the present century, he would say, "Ye are children tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine," and with a significant glance at some of the most conspicuous leaders of modern thought would proceed unabashed, "in the dice-playing and cunning craftiness of men who lie in wait to deceive."

In the absence of the cynic Paul, not a few of our modern leaders take up his incompleted task and fulfil the office against themselves. The age is at least candid. "Living for others?" The impossible ideal of a worn out Church. Nobody professes it now. "Conscience?" An echo from ancestor to ancestor down to the last descendant of the common demands of the tribe or community. Organized social selfishness with rather a long history, that is all. "Love?" An indefinite refinement of a common animal instinct. "The data of ethics?" Purely sensational. To recognise that leads to the only practical plane of motive and life open to us. When a man is cynic enough to tell me that, and it is said every month in our magazines, I venture to tell him that, in comparison with the spirit of love in Christianity which is attracting me up to the measure of Christ, he is a common dice-player, and in the name of all that is lovely and of good report I ought to bar my heart against his influence.

"These men," you say, "are better than their profession. They may delight in shocking our conventional prejudices, but in all the affairs of life they are as high-minded as one could wish." I suppose gambling has its code of honour, and gamblers commonly claim to be gentlemen. This claim notwithstanding, gambling is a species of robbery in which there is no penalty, because thief and victim have entered into a tacit understanding that whichever shall happen to be the one, and whichever happen to be the other, there shall be no prosecution. Of course these gamblers are not so coarsely avaricious as the old Ephesian adventurers. The stakes are stakes in accordance with the tastes of modern gentlemen. Passing by the intermediate teachers who reflect this outside disturbance upon the Church, let us get into contact for a moment with one of the original unbelievers who has become a focus of

doctrinal distraction and unrest to his contemporaries. Our modern thinker sits down to write his treatise. He is not even writing for guineas. He is wishing to win adherents to his views. He has caught, he tells us, some new social or scientific truth. He wants to commend it to public acceptance. Perhaps he is even frail enough to entertain the hope that his name will be associated with that particular truth. He is playing against society, playing against me as a member of society. He wants to win my adhesion. The game, I think in my ignorance and superstition, may cost me my soul. "That's one of the chances of the future. There is the highest mathematical probability against loss on that score." "But my morality may go." "Oh ! but the logic of the game is fair. It is a mathematical principle." "Take away my religious faith, and I subside at once into a heap of passions." "That is no concern of the man who is seeking scientific truth." "You stake your theory against my faith, and win. I see no reason why I should not declare myself a nihilist to-morrow if Christian motives to morality are taken from me." "The game takes no count of that. Truth must be sought at all hazards." "Take away what you call the lie of the creeds, and you leave me confronted with the greater lie of a meaningless universe." "I have moralities in reserve, should all the traditional theories of obligation melt away. When the universe has been purged of every suspicion of the spiritual, I can still find exhaustless inspiration." "Well, all I can say is, that you have a bigger moral and intellectual fortune at your back than I have. I cannot afford to play the game. You may be a gentleman in the world's sense of the term. You play for aristocratic stakes. But in the words of an old cynic of honoured memory you are a gamester in spirit, and hazard the unspeakably sacred ; and I shall take care not to be tossed hither and thither by influences springing up in such an atmosphere of perilous moral recklessness. Nay, more, allow me to say, I suspect the honour of the game. What is false in morals can never be true in science."

Deceit and imposture adapt themselves to the changing conditions of society. Do not let us be deterred from repelling the influences that distress and distract our faith now, by the idea that these influences originate in a purer and loftier moral atmosphere than corresponding influences eighteen centuries ago. The Christian teacher who tells us that his first aim is originality, and not our edification in goodness, has no claim to be heard. No religious error is purely intellectual. Good and honest men may sometimes

be found preaching a gospel of doctrinal distraction ; but trace it up through half a dozen minds to its source, and it will be found to spring from systematized imposture of a more or less subtle and refined type. Men cannot complain if we judge them out of their own mouths, and characterize them in their efforts to tamper with our faith as animated by a spirit of reckless indifference to our ethical welfare, in contrast to the active spirit of love always working for our edification through the institutions of Christianity.

Intellectual indecision is in a fair way for being vanquished if you can go with the apostle thus far. Should you have had experience of this chronic vacillation, you will be ready to say : "I know what the evil is. It keeps me a child. These antagonistic influences originate in an atmosphere that ought at once to discredit them. They do not command my allegiance. But my faith is trembling. How am I to keep it? I am not willingly drawn towards unwholesome novelties. I shudder at the thought of yielding myself up to their spell. But I seem to be shut up in an inevitable evil. How am I to keep a lifelong grip of what I have? The rational basis of the truth that has helped me in the past and made me all that I am, seems to be riven by perpetual earthquake." Let us see what help the apostle gives us on the positive side of these questions.

II. *The conditions of religious growth are suggested in the words before us.* "But speaking the truth in love." Alford translates, "Being followers of the truth"; and Ellicott, "Holding the truth in love."

The apostle is not here dealing with the broad question of Christian evidences. He does not indicate the processes by which an outsider may be brought into the faith. If he were writing for unbelievers, his line of thought might be somewhat different. His topic is the Christian creed and the Christian life in their mutual relation and development. The Christian life is the creation of the Spirit through the several instrumentalities of prophets, apostles, evangelists, pastors, and teachers.

The apostles and prophets represent *the historical facts* of the Christian faith, of which they were the inspired and authentic witnesses. They are present to us through their writings now ; perhaps present with us, like their Lord, more completely than they were present with the early Church. The Spirit ministers to us through their word as truly as it ministered by their lips and hands in Jerusalem and Ephesus and Corinth. All are ours, whether Paul or Cephas or James or John. There can be no ful-

ness of life where the historic facts accredited by these divinely qualified witnesses are lightly esteemed.

The pastors, teachers, and evangelists we may regard as *a ministry of inward Christianity*. There can be little fulness of life where the living gifts of teaching and government within the living Church are lightly esteemed. The one ministry is largely, though not exclusively, the ministry of "the old," and the other is the ministry of "the new," but each in complete mutual harmony, for the common Spirit of anointing is not the author of confusion, but of peace. The one is the complement of the other. True life with the light that always dwells in life is imparted and sustained by the Spirit through this twofold ministry. Alas for us if we despise it! The influence from an extraordinary apostolate and an ordinary pastorate, the influence of the inspired book and the influence of the living Church fellowship, are the two poles at which spiritual illumination kindles itself and streams upon our hearts. It is through this ministry we receive our life, and that life contains at once the substance and attestation of our creed. The regenerated heart is an open Bible, for him who can keep it free from the thumb-prints of the old Adam, containing the elements of all truth. It is a shallow sophistry which is accustomed to speak of a religious creed and a religious life as though they were separate and antithetical things. All religious life starts from a creed, and bears a creed as its crowning fruit. Life, and the faith which goes hand in hand with life, depend upon this double ministry and upon our attitude in relation to it.

"Holding or following the truth in love." It is only in the sphere of the renewed affections that the perception of truth in its ultimate certainties is possible. Do not hanker too anxiously after scientific verification for the highest religious truth. A child would find itself in very curious social relationships and burdened with a very leaden kind of heart, if it tried to think of its parents through the complex symbols by which biology and evolution seek to define man. Just imagine a little child trying to love that "concourse of accumulated ancestral experiences" other little children are accustomed to call "mother"! The highest spiritual truth can only be known through spiritualized affections. Do not depreciate experimental religion, with its priceless verifications of Christian doctrine. You have felt the power of God. You have trembled at the thought of His holiness. The fear of hell has kept you from sin in low stages of moral development when nothing else could. You have felt some particular conception of Christ's death fill you with an

unutterable sense of purity and freedom. The Spirit has given you light and peace through a given series of religious beliefs, and has consecrated the beliefs in the process. Not one jot or tittle of that which has helped you to religious life and righteousness can be radically false or perishable. It is an immorality in you to despise a truth that has vivified the successive developments of your religious life. There has been an energising personality behind the truth, or it would never have ministered to your life. If you despise the truth, you despise the God who has been working behind it. Would it not be shameless for a child of true and tender parents to become suddenly possessed by the suspicion that its parents had fed and clothed and trained it out of fictitious balances at the bank? If you have conscious religious life, it is from God ; and you may rest assured that God has not ministered to that life out of a series of falsehoods. Every doctrine out of which a godly thought has been born within you ought to have an inviolable sanctity. Your creed, so far as it has touched for good a single point in your experience, has been verified. You cannot separate your religious creed and your religious life. The instinct of self-preservation directs itself to the protection of life, but it keeps watch no less over all the organs and outworks of life. The instinct that leads you to protect your life leads you to protect at the same time all the limbs and senses that are planted round about it. The instinct that leads you to guard your religious life ought to lead you at the same time to guard all its organs and outworks. Religious teachers cross our path from time to time who are trying to solve the problem how many limbs they can have amputated and how many organs dissected away, and yet retain life. The experiment is curious, but a wise man will not wish to yield himself up as a subject for it. Cling to all the past truth that may have helped you with an instinct of vigilant, jealous self-preservation, and the faith that has hitherto wavered will grow staple. If God's great and all-comprehending love is brooding over you in the Church and through the ministry of all the ages, and is vitalizing whatsoever things are pure and lovely in your nature, keep a firm grip of the truths that are the keys of your relation to that love. "Holding or following the truth in love."

The touchstone of truth is its power of promoting moral growth, and little moral growth seems possible to us away from this atmosphere of Divine love diffused through the ministries of the Church. Can the Church of humanity or any Christless organization surround me with an atmosphere, in which growth into high unselfish-

ness and supreme devotion to duty will be possible to me? Its evangel rests upon a prodigious doubt, and its promises are dated so far forward that I cannot possibly anticipate their inspirations. It is true it dangles before me the prospect of the affectionate remembrance and honour of succeeding generations, when all that I am has turned to unconscious dust. But I have grave misgivings about the soundness of the promise. Most of the men with whom I have been thrown into contact have been slow to do me justice for the best acts of my life, not to say accord me honour and love. If men are slow to do me justice when I am above ground, and can vindicate myself if their injustice becomes inordinate, I cannot expect they will render me a particularly roseate immortality when I go underground and am helpless for defence. But if the promise of posthumous immortality were as good as a Bank of England note, how could it satisfy my present craving? I want a love that yearns towards me before I have become good, not to say turns tardily towards me after I have achieved goodness and the world has made discovery of the fact. If I am to grow I must be surrounded with an atmosphere of contemporary love. God loves me with a love that encircles my life on all its sides, antenatal, contemporary, posthumous, all in one; a trinity of lavish loves in undivided unity. "I have loved thee with an everlasting love." I can grow into something in an atmosphere like that. If there is truth in the simplest moralities of Jesus Christ, and I can only make a practical approach to those moralities through God's everlasting love to me, there must be truth in an equal degree in all those forms of thought through which that everlasting love makes its appeal to my heart. "But being followers of the truth in love."

III. *The standard of Christian growth.* "May grow up into Him in all things which is the Head, even Christ."

It is a frequent custom with oriental builders to erect scaffolding and put up the roof-tree, before a single stone or brick of the edifice they are about to rear has been laid. The roof-tree is not put into position after the walls have been raised to sustain it. All the parts of the building grow up into it. These matchless narratives of the four evangelists lift up before us a roof-tree into which the Church temple is to grow. The standard has been established in the incarnate life of Jesus Christ. His life was one long, adoring vision of God combined with one long pitying vision of man, and its outward incidents were the signs that signified to those standing without, the unutterable vision at the golden altar. The life was full enough of suffering, but not a single hesitancy can we detect in

it from end to end. His hand held a cup such as no other hand had ever clasped, and paused, but never trembled or drew back. "Whatsoever the Father did was revealed to the Son." In the clearness of His human perceptions, as well as in the power of His Divine essence, the Son of man whilst dwelling amongst men was ever "in heaven." The life was spotless, and the sacrifice unwavering and absolute,—a continuous daily carrying of the cross on which He died, because the faith was unclouded and steadfast. And this unclouded vision of God and of the world for which He gave Himself was received and sustained through the Spirit that descended upon Him in visible witness at His baptism, when the heavens were opened to His humanity, and the glory of the far off wonders streamed into the nature He had received of the Virgin. The standard is put up for us in Jesus Christ. And it is this same Spirit which prepared this humanity and then inhabited it with constant light, which proceeds from Him to us, which works through the true Christian ministry in all its forms, and will, if we are followers of the truth in love, take us up even into the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ. Christ has given that Spirit to create in you and me what it created in His own incarnate life, the same plenitude of conviction, the same sanctified sympathy, the same consecration to tasks of unceasing love, the same consciousness of the Father's soul-contenting favour and approval. It is to lift you and me up into the same standard that He still divides to every man severally as He will. Is it not a dishonour to Christ, a sheer mockery of His pattern, a flaunted insult to His headship, that we should spend months and years in the doctrinal fluctuations of a religious babyhood? Let us take heed lest the light that is in us be darkness. Have a sound, personal, self-verifying faith to yourself before God. Truth received upon the basis of external authority is but the fleeting glow of sunset hovering for a moment in the windows before darkness comes. I once stood on the summit of the Genoese Tower in Constantinople, and watched across the Bosphorus a weird, flaming sunset that seemed to touch every pane of glass on Scutari, till one might have fancied that long line of erections had been fired, and the red flames were just about to burst out through the windows. A few moments glided silently away, and all was shrouded in darkness. Such is belief upon external authority. Let us take care that every window of the soul is lit from within. There are lines of subtle relation with Jesus Christ, the Light of the world, that we cannot trace up with the senses, but the reality of which will be verified by the measure of

practical illumination within us. Let us live in unbroken spiritual fellowship with the Light lighting every man. Should the darkness of an all but universal unbelief settle upon our age, if we honour the truth-revealing Spirit of Christ as our guest, every window of the palace shall flash with light, and every chamber shall ring with song, whilst the night of a cheerless and un pitying antichrist wails and shudders in the world without. No darkness lingers where the Spirit dwells, and the Spirit does not long hide Himself from sincere, obedient hearts. Already sent, He but waits apt occasion for His work.

Let Christ's life awaken the prayer for a fuller development within you of the work of Him who was the Creator of all its high human qualities. Aspire after Christ's own confident, undeviating perception of the truth. Aspire in your degree after that baptism of wisdom and revelation which made heaven in all but the last darkness of the cross an open vision, and which enabled Christ to say in His life of subordination and service as well as in His life of glory and exaltation, "The Father loveth the Son, and sheweth all things that Himself doeth." Aspire after that crystal, tireless outflow of tender and holy deed which broke day and night like an immortal fountain from the Spirit of knowledge and discernment within Him. That is the standard into which you are to grow, and you might have been perceptibly nearer to it now but for the hesitations and dubitations of the past.

X.

THE BEATITUDE OF UNFALTERING FAITH.

“Blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in Me.”—*Matt.* xi. 6.

THE words of this message from Jesus Christ to John in prison bring before us one of the most pathetic pictures to be found in the New Testament pages. The theory has been widely held that John's faith, founded as it was in his own prophetic gift, as well as in the sign from heaven at Christ's baptism, did not, in any degree, waver in prison, and that the two disciples were sent to ask, “Art thou He?” for their own instruction only. We may dismiss that theory at once. We are nowhere taught that inspiration guarantees its favoured possessor against all future doubt, and creates a faith superior to the stern conditions that test the faith of the common crowd. Christ's answer moreover is so suited to the peculiarities of John's position, and so finely attuned to all the traits of his personal character and experience, that it seems to take no note of the bystanders or the messengers who are to carry it back to the shores of the Dead Sea. There can be little doubt that the shadows of an imprisonment, now protracted through many months, were beginning to assert their power over the prophet's spirits, and that the pangs of disheartenment, suspicion, and incipient despair, pangs unknown in the solitude of the desert or the rush of public service, were threatening to rack his strong and heroic soul.

The questions that agitated a man so colossal in character, and with such strong claims upon our admiration, cannot fail to engage our interest and sympathy, apart from the points of contact with our own mental tribulations which they suggest. Here we have a prophet whose faith has hitherto been as steady as the march of the sun to its meridian. His glance has singled out the Lord's Anointed from thousands. In the most imperative and unwaver-

ing fashion he has commended Him to his own disciples and to the multitudes of Israel. He has bowed himself before this new Teacher with a loyalty almost painful in its severe self-suppression and disinterestedness. He has pointed his own adherents away from himself to this mysterious Stranger ; and—grand triumph of unselfishness, triumph worthy of the highest Christian enlightenment and inspiration,—without a murmur he has watched the tide of popular favour ebb away from his own feet, and circle about the feet of his great Successor. That was voluntary sacrifice.

But now involuntary suffering comes, and he begins to fret beneath it. His unselfish service seems to be ignored. The new Teacher is moving about on those levels of popular favour to which He was introduced by the word of the Baptist himself, healing the sick, casting out devils, raising the dead, and John seems forgotten. Not to speak of miracles of deliverance, no friendly visit, no tender and thoughtful word comes from this supposed Messiah to break the gloom and monotony of the tropical prison. The tie of kinship seems despised, the claim of past service forgotten, the promise of the opening ministry to unloose the bound set aside, and John's whole conception of the Messianic office and character turned upside down.

Christ's message was to assure the Baptist that all was more wisely ordered than he thought, to warn in a tender undertone softly modulated to the tension of the forerunner's suffering, against the loss of faith ; and to hint by a benediction that took all the sting from the rebuke, that the kingdom was even now dawning for the penitent on earth, and for John himself, if faithful a little longer, in heaven.

These words imply that the temptation to unbelief is inward and experimental rather than speculative in its origin ; it starts in a wounded affection rather than in the revolt of the reason and the understanding. It was not enough that the Baptist's thought should be turned to the outward sign of Christ's Messiahship. Christ's message on that point only confirmed what he already knew by common rumour. The healing of mental tribulation must begin within. The most convincing sign will fail of its appointed end, unless the mind can be freed from the distress of its own entangling wilfulness and preconception, and made loving and loyal in its every fibre and sensibility. "Blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in Me."

I. These words suggest a *danger of secret and subtle disaffection* of heart towards Christ that threatens to destroy faith.

Our Lord felt how much there was in Himself and His plans that was out of harmony with the best opinion of the time. Whilst the most advanced mind of the old dispensation was staggered by His method, He knew He must inevitably become a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence to men at large, unless they could be warned against themselves.

The peculiarities of *early education* often give rise to this temptation of offence in Christ. The past twelve months of Christ's ministry had been replete with proofs of His Divine authority ; but the proofs were not of such a character, nor did they seem to attest the particular kind of Messiah, that John's special education had led him to expect. The strain of race-pride and theocratic tradition and legal dogmatism that had entered into that education had not been completely subdued by the discipline of his fasting and prayers. The prejudices in which he had been cradled seemed to come back with weird potency in his closing days. In all his views of the new kingdom of heaven he was still tenacious of the historic standpoints of interpretation. That temper of patriotism, almost inseparable from the religious life of the Jew, was shocked, by Christ's apparent indifference to questions of blood and ancestry and natural brotherhood in his first attempts to work out the Messianic problem. It was true the Father had sealed this obscure descendant of David as His very Son at the baptism, and strange signs had attended the footsteps of Jesus ever since ; but to the typical Jew, Jesus seemed to deny His own anointing, and to belie by the manner of His every-day life the witness of God's sign. Was it for nought that John had preached Messiah's fire for the chaff, and His axe for the fruitless tree ? Where could riper stuff for His judgments be found than that which choked the palaces and judgment-seats and synagogues on every hand, yea, the very Temple itself ? If ever a dispensation of judicial chastisement was needed, it was needed now ; and yet Christ was preaching a new dispensation of forbearance and longsuffering ! The national suspense, sufficiently excruciating for all pious and patriotic souls, was to be indefinitely prolonged.

John's sympathy with the spirit of the theocratic righteousness had half blinded him to the mercy in which the rule of the Lord's Anointed was to dawn. To affirm or to deny the Messiahship of the young Nazarene was attended with almost equal difficulty, and John's soul was shut up in a dilemma as hopeless as the fortress that immured his body. To affirm, was to do violence to the prepossessions of past education, prepossessions too that had been

fostered by the sacred word itself, and the Divine and human elements of which John could not very well disentangle from each other. To deny, was to call the past a dream and to contest the incontestable sign. A universe, every atom of which was a separate seal of Christ's authority, could not have helped John till this message had come to point out the root of his distraction, and to rally his faltering faith by its promise of love. The shadows of the prison were nursing back to life and feverish activity the egoism that had been mortified in the deserts, and John was crying out for proof that his career as the forerunner had not been misguided, and for just the kind of proof that he might choose to dictate. The proof was not forthcoming. Proof asked under such circumstances never is, for it would be fatal to a soul's welfare to humour the caprices of its morbid egoism. Happily John submitted the doubts by which he was haunted to his Master. Though the mystery was not solved at once, John received in reply a message whose tenderness sufficed to detach his thought from himself and centre it on another ; and he was satisfied,—satisfied throughout the remaining term of his imprisonment, and meekly confident of the promised blessedness when, amidst the gathering shadows of a festal eventide, he lifted up his bowed head, and the form of Herod's tall swordsman stood before him, to cut the knot of the problem.

We too have the prejudices of our own special education and standpoint. We are tempted to think that Christ stands too far aloof from the genius of our present-day civilizations. He ought to come down to our age, our community, our decade. He ought to certify Himself by the rules of our own special logic. We want evidence here and now and in this particular way. We of course see what are the particular lines by which His religion must spread in these last days. It ought to commend itself to our most elaborately educated tastes and faculties. Some time ago an irreverent Frenchman said, "The nineteenth century, that is the Messiah." Our prejudice is held in restraint by a degree of underlying reverence, and we should never say anything so impious as that ; but do we not sometimes wish that Christ would clothe Himself in some of the special attributes of the century ? He is too Semitic. Men mean that, when they quote Carlyle's sneers about "the exodus from Houndsditch" and "casting off the old Hebrew clothes." We are in danger of growing lukewarm to Christ, because He was a plain and penniless Syrian, who stood at the intersecting point of all civilizations and cultures, without identifying Himself with

any, and was not only a native of one of the least distinguished districts of one of the least distinguished lands of the earth, but was looked down upon even by His own fellow-villagers. He does not favour the pet traditions of our day. Immortal in His heroism and unselfishness He may be, but He does not seem to have found the secret of rendering Himself acceptable to the last quarter of our magnificent century.

Now in pushing our own special prejudices of training and association to the forefront, in asking at Christ's hands evidence that shall impress our own particular generation, rather than that which is suited to impress all generations alike, are we just to the sovereignty of God, who sent His Son at this particular time and in this particular way, or to the lowliness of the Son, who thus chose to take upon Himself the form of a servant? Are we not cold and loveless and unbelieving, because the bias of our education or personal standpoint has been overlooked? Should we not be more completely on Christ's side, if He would only take into account our personal idiosyncrasy in His methods? Do we not need this warning against offence in Christ or perhaps even the sterner "Woe," Christ made to ring in the ears of His disciples, when He was speaking to them on this selfsame subject of offence?

This temptation is sometimes connected with the fact that Christ *seems to abandon His friends to the most cruel suffering and oppression*. The unbelief that starts in suffering rather than in a syllogism of the scribe has a special claim to sympathy and patient love. Christ dealt very tenderly and mercifully with that. Few were the words He wasted upon the speculative scepticisms of the schools; but when the spectre of doubt came as one of the shadows of an unrighteous imprisonment, when it arose amid the vapours of an oppressed brain and tormented senses, Christ cast it out by the sweetest exorcism His lips could frame. The doubt of this sufferer was no pedantic assumption, no affectation of superior wisdom, but the outcome of unsearchable and unmerited pain. Hence the inimitable graciousness of the admonition.

Abstract sympathy however offered no clue to the question John was debating in prison, although it might take away the sting of this apparent neglect. If Lord of a kingdom of righteousness, why did He not wither the oppressor and set the innocent victim free? Why this marble indifference to the most moving claim that could come before His notice? He was unresting in His efforts to help those who were without the shred of a claim upon His kindness, and, as far as a spectator could judge, unmoved by the tragic

lot of the one man who had the double claim of kinship and rare, personal devotion and service. In all this may there not have been a foreshadowing of the doctrine of grace? The undeserving are helped and the deserving unhelped, to emphasise the freeness of the mercy Christ was enthroned to administer in His kingdom. "The poor have the gospel preached to them": that was the climax of all the miracles, and John seems to be invited to participate by his meek, un murmuring resignation in the vicarious ministry of Him who "bare our sicknesses." And then Christ's apparent oversight of John may have been necessary to remind men that common blood and a common Abrahamic descent could not, as the Jews had been accustomed to suppose, be made the basis of salvation in Messiah's kingdom. John's indomitable and unresting nature may have needed to be softened and perfected by chastisement and solitude. By this apparent neglect he was lifted to a higher level of character. He learned to suffer in contentment, so that the relief of others' suffering by Christ might go on without the interruption of an hour. Up to this time his suffering was a riddle. It seemed to put him out of harmony with Christ. The "why" and the "wherefore" of his seeming desertion haunted his loneliness with a new terror, and grated its discords in every clank of his chains.

Do not we sometimes fall into the temptation of thinking that Christ underestimates our temporal well being? There are voices in the world around us declaring that no great improvement can be made in the condition of the classes that suffer till the spell of Christianity has been broken. Religion is so busy in dealing with the things of a remote and uncertain future, that it has no time to grapple with the maladies of the passing hour. An atheistic conception of the universe is sometimes commended to us on the ground that, if it cannot engage to deliver us from pain, it can at least deliver us from the terrible thought that pain is laid upon us by the will of an intelligent Creator. The assertion is so subtle and captivating, that our secret loyalties of spirit almost tremble in the balance. Many of us can master all our speculative misgivings, but we are staggered by this question of unrighteous suffering. Why this rankling wrong? Why this undeserved pain? Why this barren martyrdom? Can all we are told about the sympathy of Christ, and His will to deliver us from misery of every kind, be true? We could bear it if the Master who claims to love us were unable to help. Well, if pain has to be borne at all, it is incomparably better that it should be turned to the ends

of our moral discipline and perfecting, than that it should run to waste. The godless conception of pain makes it the blind disaster of uncontrolled mechanism. The religious conception of pain makes it a step in the process of a wise and a beneficent surgery. I would rather endure it under the skilled hand and the gracious eye of my Divine Healer, than endure it as a meaningless accident.

We are not competent to say what is unrighteous suffering. The suffering that is unrighteous, looked at from the standpoint of the wrong-doer who causes it, becomes righteous, looked at from the standpoint of the Sanctifier of my life, who is seeking to make me perfect through it. If He with power to free me from it restrains His hand for the time, I must look upon the suffering in its secondary stage, as His decree, and await His interpretation through the accomplished work. Lest the pain that is imposed upon us, the contempt, disesteem, misjudgment of our contemporaries, and, most of all, Christ's own apparent indifference to our secret cry, should put a jarring string into our hearts, and throw them out of tune with the Divine, let us hear the admonition of One who was Himself perfected through un murmuring pain. "Blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in Me."

The *limitations that hem in our love of the excitements and activities of public service* often give rise to this peril. And more especially will this be the case where there mingles itself with that love some hidden vein of unsanctified self-esteem.

John might naturally think that his work was slighted. He had received an inspiration that placed him at the very head of the goodly fellowship of the prophets, had drawn and awed crowds by the fierce magic of his mingled threatenings and expostulations, and had hitherto been standing to all appearance upon the threshold only of his illustrious career. He was still young, with all his powers in vigorous and vital exercise; a mass of moral sinew, without a grain of grossness to clog its quick movement; a grand spiritual athlete, undaunted before the strongest hierarchies of the day. He had scarcely touched the high meridian of his powers. If there was one work for which he was more fitted than another, it was the reformation work of these stern, stirring times. He possessed an exquisite providential adaptation to the demands of the hour, and yet Christ allows him to be cast aside like a broken and worthless weapon. The cry of his spirit for service—hard, unrequited, perilous to life itself if need be—is unheeded. John cannot realize as yet that, as he has been Christ's type and forerunner in his public teaching, he must now be type and forerunner:

likewise in his final suffering. They did to the forerunner as to the Lord Himself "whatsoever they listed." In the martyrdom of the Baptist Christ saw the mirror of His own doom. Two vocations were contending within John. He did not fathom the issues hidden in this conflict. For the moment, the faith that had hitherto guided his life with an incisiveness, sharp as the edge of the lightning, wavered, and seemed ready to fail.

And in our quieter paths, some of us may be just on the point of stumbling, for very similar causes. Our service seems lightly esteemed in the dispensation under which we are placed. Possibly we feel within us a capacity for effective religious enterprise, from the exercise of which we are cut off by some embarrassing condition in our lives. We may have received the special anointing of the Holy One, and yet we are mysteriously forbidden to touch the very work for which we have been qualified by that anointing. Christ seems to place an inferior value upon our service. He might put us to more prominent uses. We have received the Spirit. Why should not honourable responsibility be entrusted to us? We have never belied our love, and are loyal to all His interests. How is it that we only hear the rumble of His far off movements, and are not permitted to step forth as approved fellow workers in His cause? Can it be His work if our service is to have no place in it? In questionings of this sort is there no secret self-esteem? Are we not thinking quite as much of ourselves, and the honour Christ's work will reflect upon us, as of that work itself which we profess to have at heart? We are sure to be offended in Christ, unless these pious egotisms are effectually mortified. We need to be brought into yet lower depths of humiliation. In all this there is temptation, not less perilous because it is insidious. Remember that in the supreme hour of the establishment of Messiah's kingdom, the greatest of the Old Testament prophets was passed by. The man who had said without a regret, "He must increase, but I must decrease," had to be refined to a yet more perfect humility by a test that seemed to dishonour his gift, and in the crisis of trial needed the admonition against impatient offence.

This peril sometimes springs up because *our knowledge of Christ comes through indirect and prejudiced channels.*

There had been scarcely any intercourse between the King and the herald who was sent to announce His coming. After the days of childhood, Jesus and the Baptist probably only once saw each other face to face. Now this was a disability for John's personal

faith, although a gain in the end to the cause of Christ. The Baptist's adherents were in different stages of conviction, some of them shading off into the better kind of Pharisees, and others rising into as high a faith as the chosen twelve themselves. If the Baptist had left his adherents and become a personal follower of Christ, the majority of his adherents, who were not prepared to imitate him in such a step, would have fallen back into Jewish formalism. This premature catholicity would have scattered to the winds these groups of unripe disciples, and rent in twain the coming kingdom of heaven. John's admitted duty was to stay with the following he had created, to save them against the disaster of reaction and backsliding, and to guide them, as time softened their angles of prejudice and his own insight grew, into full faith in the anointed Deliverer. But this duty kept him away from the range of Christ's personal influence, and made him more or less susceptible to the influence of his own partisans. Christ's own disciples never altogether lost faith in the fact of Christ's Messiahship, although they too were staggered by the steps taken in the fulfilment of its functions. They could not doubt under the spell of Christ's eye. John's duty to others shut him out from personal association with Christ, and kept him within the Old Testament lines. His views moreover of Christ's work and ministry came to him in the heated and overdrawn utterances of his own disciples, who were wont to debate somewhat acrimoniously with Christ's disciples, and by vague, fragmentary rumour. He did not get Christ's methods and principles at first hand. They came to him on the wind, and the finer accents were lost, or through the heats of controversy, and the delicate lights and shades were burnt away. Christ's own disciples too sometimes misconceived and misdescribed Christ's methods and principles, and John's perplexities would not be made any the less serious by this. A word with Christ would have dispersed many a mist, but that was impossible. The Baptist must remain loyal to his King in the midst of distorted views of Christ, loyal when the temper and spirit and attitude of some of Christ's personal followers might make that loyalty no easy thing.

This offence may arise in us because we too have to view Christ, in some of His relations, through crude, ignoble, small-minded representatives. He is not infrequently surrounded by a following that has little claim to dictate to us. His name is bandied about in unprofitable controversies. We see Him in the wrangling sects, through heated partisanships, behind the dust-clouds raised by

His body-guard of Church Ishmaels. His dignity is not left to steal over our spirits like the dawn, nor His love to distil itself like the dew, nor the power of His kingdom to unfold itself like the river rising from the quiet fountains into invincible volume. His holiest mysteries are made a gage of controversial tournaments, tests of competing infallibilities, the keys of entrance into jealous and opposing discipleships. Men in the high places of the Church sometimes seem to realize Christ's description of the servant who "began to beat his fellow servants," if indeed they do not "eat and drink with the drunken," and they affect to be quite ignorant of the fact that Christ ever condemned their theories of the rights of office. In the various communities of Christ's followers, the meanest and most ignorant scheme for power, and scramble into positions of influence. Those loudest in profession are sometimes notoriously crooked in business principles and of ungenerous temper in social life. It is not easy to think there is a perfect and supreme Lord behind burlesque of this sort. The standing miracle of the ages is that men should have continued to believe in a faultless spiritual perfection represented by all this imperfection. Our hearts are apt to be very cold towards a Lord who is often commended to us by zealous ignorance and sometimes by zealous obliquity. In how many of us have love to the Lord, faith in His living presence, devotion to the interests of His kingdom, been checked by contact with His erring and blemished disciples? From many a high and sacred task have we not been turned aside, because our hearts have been filled with a secret repugnance to the people who often seem to be doing Christ's work, and who claim to represent His teaching and character?

Is it not a part of Christ's plan that we should see Him for a time in some of His relations, through these imperfect representatives? The so-called "sects," like the opposing discipleships of Jesus and John, are providentially adapted to the work they do. Disband the "sects," and many would turn back to the world who are united in some feeble fashion to Christ now, and who will be united to Him by the closest spiritual affinities by-and-by. Taking the world for what it is, these idiosyncrasies that embody themselves in variously organized communities are the very expression of Christ's universal love. Is it a cause of reproach to Him that His love, because of its boundless catholicity, should be sometimes compelled to organize itself in what may seem uncatholic forms? And in reference to Christ's imperfect witnesses and advocates, it is the very essence of our loyalty to

His person and plans that we should learn to sympathise with the hopefulness and moral generosity that seek to improve these miserable types. Is it, forsooth, a just cause of complaint against Christ, that He admits to His grace and discipline, men who have not dropped all their excrescences and imperfections, and as one of the steps in their salvation, uses them whilst they are in the process of being purified and ennobled? That is the very glory of Christ, and it is our pitiable pharisaism which blinds us to the fact. Never love Christ less because He is indulgent and magnanimous to the imperfect. Beware lest the fallible factors and elements that mix themselves up with your views of Christ should touch a hidden antipathy within you and cause you to stumble. Do not fall into the madness of charging upon Christ the faults of coarse, narrow, captious followers. Some of them are illiterate, provincial, self-assertive. Never allow the distrust and misgiving excited by blemishes in the people who are about Christ to be transferred to Christ Himself. Take heed lest the offences that come in your relation with fellow-labourers and fellow-disciples work their way up into your relation with Christ, and fret your faith and love. Let your very rebound from men be a rebound towards Christ, your recoil from their faithlessness, imperfection, fallibility be a step of nearer approach to your meek and perfect and faithful Master.

II. *Consider the beatitude of the heart that is proof against this hidden temptation.*

How exact the knowledge of human nature displayed in this utterance! How boundless the appreciation of high moral worth! Christ tempers His rebuke with words full of honour for a great soul, and as soon as the two disciples had returned, vindicates John against the suspicion of weakness and vacillation by the noblest words of praise that the world has ever heard. Christ's gentleness in this rebuke of John contrasts suggestively with the sharp rebuke of His own disciples to which He was sometimes driven. John's position was limited in privilege, but in that generation his massiveness of character was matchless. The bosom-disciples themselves did not tower as yet into any such splendour of moral promise. Christ addressed the Baptist softly, as though the approach of the executioner's footsteps were already heard. The very rebuke shaped itself into a specific prophecy of conquest. Christ knew just the measure of admonition, and just the measure of encouragement, His great servant needed; and He adjusted the one to the other, and each to the bleeding sensibilities of the

prophet, with the silken touch of an exact science. The same solar force which piles up the avalanche that can sweep out hamlets with its many-tonned artillery, and feeds the glacier that scoops the valleys that cradle empires, is yet gentle enough to spirit the snow-drop and primrose and gentian with their spheres of gossamer beauty, unharmed from their dreams beneath the snow. So the same mighty word that was just withering to its very roots a fruitless theocracy, and gravely out the vast lines of a coming Christendom, was so finely modulated, that it could administer painless rebuke to the spirit of a prophet fast-bound in affliction and iron, and win a way for his half-crushed, shrinking, sensitive faith into the warmth and balm and summer sunshine of the endless dawn.

Not offended in Christ, he proved the beatitude of *an unwavering faith in the hour of trial*. No curse that can poison human life is so deep and dire as the curse of a lost trust. The higher the dignity of him who once commanded that trust, and the larger the hope to which it gave rise, the vaster the profound into which a soul is plunged by its loss. There is a spring of year-long blessedness in the very nature of faith itself. The most brilliant and unshadowed life that can be lived under the sun, if it lack trust, has a scathing anathema in it. The life of cruel oppression, ending in the fiercest death that fiends can devise, with faith in it, is peace and music and praise. The power of trust is in itself a power of inward gladness. Those to whom Christ is a stone of stumbling are left without hope or defence in the day of their chastisement, and walk as with lacerated flesh through piercing thorns. What a hell that stone cell by the Dead Sea would have become, if John could have thought that he had been utterly misled! What a tormenting demon the form of Herod's grim swordsman would have become, if John could have thought that he had brought himself within the fatal sweep of that arm by serving an impostor Messiah, and that many a righteous man might find himself as cruelly victimised in the end by his own fidelity and unselfishness! Christ's word brought peace to the prison, and dissolved its evil dreams. The captive prophet fastened on the sweet cadence of this promise. He kept his faith in the dispensation of mystery, and in the last tribulation of his short and eventful life he proved the benediction of believing without offence.

This beatitude includes full *salvation from all the power and disability of sin*. John's fastings had brought no deliverance from

a fear and a burden, felt in proportion to the strictness of his own righteous life, and had only quickened his longings for the sin-bearing Messiah. Some months before he had hailed Him as the sacrificial Lamb, and had been awaiting at His hands the complete salvation that his own desert exercises had failed to bring. He had seen the tops of the palms that seemed to mark the presence of that well for which he was thirsting. But, after all, was it the mirage? and were the waving branches only beckoning to waters that fail? The feast seemed to have been spread for the rejoicing subjects of Messiah's kingdom; but was it, after all, only the dream of happy delirium that sometimes comes to the imagination of the famished? and were these questionings the first symptoms of a cruel waking? The Deliverer had drawn nigh, but were His credentials all that could be desired? Questions of this sort might have kept John as effectually separated from the Messiah and His redemptive gifts as though he had been an inhabitant of an unredeemed and despairing world. Happily the phantom of the vexed heart was banished and faith exercised without offence. Herod's captive began to see at last that the earthly kingdom for which he had pined was denied him only because its limits were too narrow to receive the vastness of the Messianic gift, and he was content to die that he might prove its unfathomed mysteries of blessing. Whatever secretly alienates us from Christ robs us of the benefits of that salvation He is appointed to achieve in us. If we are offended and cannot receive Christ, we are kept out of the best gifts that are put in His keeping. If we could look into heaven itself and feel the spell of its beauty and song, and then could see that all this was in the hand of Christ, we could not receive it, however potent the fascination, without first putting out of our hearts this temptation to offence. Whoever keeps himself free from offence is enriched with all that lies within His dominion to whom all power in heaven and earth has been given.

Not offended in Christ, John proved the beatitude linked with *conformity to a higher plan of life* than his own. If the temper of hidden loyalty be maintained, life will be worked out for us in agreement with counsels that will issue in higher honour and more abiding satisfactions than our own. John could not picture a future for himself other than of activity, heroism, unselfishness. But his own future would have been barren in comparison with that which God was ordaining for his trial and for his deathless renown. If John had been brought out of prison and given a chief place amongst Christ's followers, he could not have been the same

glorious example of faith in suffering he was destined to become, the highest flower into which the religious life of the Jews rose after fifty generations before it died. His martyrdom has elements of gloomy grandeur, unequalled I think by any Christian martyrdom. His uncomplaining submission to death, in the solemn twilight of that mysterious time when the eyes of those around him were watching for the rising Sun of righteousness and the immortality brought to light by His appearing, submission like that of a meek, weary child closing its eyes and sinking into sure rest, is incomparably grand in its pathos. Near to Jesus Christ in suffering ; drinking of His cup before the Redeemer Himself was called to drink it ; feeling, as it were, the way for the King of whom he was the herald, through the darkness and mystery of death ; less than the least though he were in the kingdom of grace on earth,—surely he is nearer than all others to the enthroned Sufferer in heaven. The blessedness that has crowned his life of meek, unoffended faith is surely no less unique than the perplexities and limitations of that life. Do not let us be too much concerned to smooth down the rough places in our lot. We should be despoiled of our highest honours if foolishness could have its way. Our ideal life is traced for us by a more discerning wisdom, a broader love, a more soaring ambition than our own. Let us see to it that the unsubmitive spirit never keeps us back from the full accomplishment of that ideal and from the unutterable beatitude to which it leads.

Remember, Christ is Master, you are servant. Never forget, as John might seem to have forgotten for a few short moments, the protestation about “the shoe latchet” and Christ’s higher prerogative. If He is essentially before you, and you have felt your need to be baptized of Him, you must let Him fulfil Himself in His own way. How little we know of what is best for us ! How much He knows with all worlds in view ! Submit to this high moral sovereignty. Can you not trust the counsels of Him who died for you ? Can you not follow in the print of feet that were persistently turned to Jerusalem through the months of a long, weary, winter wandering to die, and that never turned back from the goal of vicarious pain to find rest and refuge ? The plan of your life has been sketched by a Hand that has the scar of a strange love upon it. Cannot the memory of that make you loyal to the plan ? If after this momentary struggle, John could keep his heart secure against offence as a predecessor of Christ, can you not do so, who are only called to follow in Christ’s train ? He took up his

cross and went before Christ. You follow after only. John was a forerunner. That involved a great deal more than to be a successor. He was called to walk forth to prison, and thence to pass into the grave with his back to the light. You are walking in the noonday. With your ampler privilege if offended in Christ, surely the Baptist will confront you in the judgment for your condemnation ; for his Messiah was a far-off Prophet only, to all appearance indifferent to his need and pain, and John had to send from prison to catch echoes of His teaching. Your Messiah is more than dim and distant wonder-worker. He is manifested love without the veil of a cloud ; above, around, and within all His followers even to the end of the world.

XI.

CHRIST THE WAY, THE TRUTH, AND THE LIFE.

"I am the way, the truth, and the life : no man cometh unto the Father but by Me."—*John* xiv. 6.

AS a preliminary to our meditations upon these words, we must pass under rapid review the circumstances leading up to their utterance. The words go back in their reference as far as the departure of Judas after the Last Supper, for they contain an answer to the questions asked by Peter, "Lord, whither goest Thou?" and, "Why cannot I follow Thee now?" as well as to the more speculative question of Thomas, "Lord, we know not whither Thou goest, and how can we know the way?" Indeed, substantially the same question is asked by both, by Peter with the accent natural to a man of action, by Thomas with the accent of a philosopher.

The question of Peter not improbably expresses a feeling prevalent amongst the majority of the disciples. Christ had just repeated to the disciples the announcement once made to the Jews, "Whither I go ye cannot come," and in their impatience and shortsightedness they wanted a policy squared up for them in the unknown years that were at hand, a programme of movement minutely defined and authoritatively sanctioned. They aspired to serve Christ after some fashion of ostentatious heroism. But this could not be. Their first duty was one of contemplation. They had to stand still and watch their Lord, to receive Christ and His coming Spirit into their hearts by faith, and so to work the works of God. The speculation of Thomas seeks to penetrate into that unseen world, sunlit glimpses of which open before us for a moment in this fourteenth chapter of St. John. But the speculation was more curious than devout, better calculated to engage and entertain

the intellect than to give a saving direction to the steps. To the aspiring hero, Christ announces that He Himself is "the way." All movement must be within the sphere of His life and precept and authority. To the aspiring student, Christ announces that He Himself is "the truth." All perception of spiritual things must start with the apprehension of Himself. And then He presents Himself under His own elect expression as "the life," an expression richer in its profound suggestiveness and better fitted to bring us to the core of spiritual reality and experience than any other human language can offer.

In the opening utterances of this chapter, Christ hints to us, in a few pregnant words, the splendour and the amplitude of the Father's house. Before the lapse of many sentences the view has narrowed to the supreme centre of attraction, the Father Himself. All the terms of the text must be explained with this one dominant personality in view. They are correlated, or rather successively ascending, expressions of the same idea. It is through Jesus Christ we must approach the Father. "He is the way." Having come into the presence of the Father, it is through Jesus Christ that we must come to the clear knowledge of His nature and will. "He is the truth." And it is through Jesus Christ that we must be quickened into conscious communion with the Father and participate in His deathless nature of love. "He is the life."

But before we pass to any further point in our meditations, a question claims our consideration. What did Christ mean by the expression, "coming to the Father"? "No man cometh to the Father, but by Me." Christ has just been speaking of His own return to the bosom of the Father in Paradise, and it is evidently of this that the disciples have been thinking and are still thinking ; and yet the coming spoken of in the verse immediately before us would seem to be a coming possible to men in the present life. Why this silent change in the meaning of the terms ? Christ surely does not confound a destiny and a moral act, the death that opens heaven to us, and that coming to God by faith, which is one of the privileges of our present life. The goal of the Redeemer's departure is surely not the same as that into which the disciple is at once introduced in virtue of his trust in the work and person of the Redeemer. In the one case, Christ is speaking of His own return to participate in the glory which He had with the Father before the foundation of the world ; and in the other case, He is speaking of the soul's approach to God by its common acts of trust and adoration and worship. Have these ideas some secret though

unseen tie of unity? Is the chasm between them not so wide as may at first sight seem? Christ surely does not seek to appease the impatience and curiosity of the disciples by now using the term in a lower and more earthly sense. Peter and Thomas ask about the "whither" of Christ's own going. Christ speaks in reply, in part at least, about the "whither" to which faith in His person and teaching and love at once introduces His follower. Has this change in the use of the expression, this unannounced transition from what might seem a higher to a lower meaning, this apparent indifference on the part of our Lord to the fact that He was not attaching to the expression the same import the disciples had just attached to it, any lesson for us?

We believe it has, and the lesson is this. We must not project idle hopes to those great changes and turning points in our history that come upon us from without. If we would only believe it, heaven is nearer than our fondest dreams can guess. All the essential principles upon which the life of heaven is founded, if not indeed the accessory glories with which it is garnished, are within our daily touch. The kingdom of God is within you. The long stretch of years and the dim spaces of suns and systems, we too often look upon as interposed between our present and our endless blessedness are, after all, but the elongated shadows of our worldliness and unbelief. To come unto the Father, that is heaven. whether as He shines upon His contrite servants who present themselves in the name of the Mediator before the throne of grace below, or welcomes His triumphant servants from the throne of glory in the holy place on high. In all approaches to the Father, Christ recognised the same identical experiences, the thrill of the same spiritual attractions, and was all but unconscious of the vast gulfs of time and space, that men are apt to look upon as separating between their present and their future world. Would we reach Christ's point of view we must think of heaven more as a life into which we shall grow through fellowship with Himself, a state into which we shall pass by our own moral and spiritual acts, and less of it as a new environment to which we shall one day be forcibly transplanted by the inevitable hand of death. The kingdom is within. We do not need to die to be thrilled with its essential rapture. We touch it in our present approaches to God through the Mediator.

The moral character with which Christ invests His own approaching departure illustrates the substantial identity of meaning in the different uses of the same expression. He had always

contemplated His own life in its interior and spiritual aspects. He did not measure it by outward incidents. He had long since spoken of Himself as "the Son of man which is in heaven." The infirmities of the flesh, the vexations of His daily life, the contradictions of unbelief that confronted Him, could not shut Him out of that high and ever-accessible sphere of life. And it is nothing strange or new that is now to befall Him. No inexorable destiny is about to hurry Him on. He is entering upon all of His own free choice. "I have power to lay down My life, and I have power to take it again." "I go unto the Father." His death was not an event that *overtook* Him, but an exalted act of worship: "He offered Himself without spot to God." His life in the holy place continues that act: "He ever liveth to make intercession for us." It is the continuity under nobler outward conditions of the life He lived on earth. But the conditions of the new mediatorial kingdom upon which He was entering were economic, and not final. The final state to which the New Testament directs our anticipation is to be introduced by the solemn act in which Christ gives up the perfected kingdom to the Father, and God becomes all in all. Christ was thinking not so much of what was outward in His history, but of the movement of His own spirit towards the Father in the terrestrial, intermediate, and final states. The same active moral impulse bound all the stages of His spiritual history into one. It was of the exercise and attitude of His own soul, rather than of thrones and crowns and the homage of greeting angels, of His love as about to express itself in the wider emancipation and the more commanding sphere of power that was at hand, that Christ thought when He thus spoke of going to the Father.

The rapid and unannounced transition from the idea of Christ going back to the Father, to be glorified together with Him, to the idea of the disciples' present access to the Father through faith in the Son, implies some underlying unity of experience. Faith, as exercised now, puts the believer in the light of the Father's face. Faith exercised when death has smitten off all the trammels of the senses will unveil the mysterious Face itself whose reflected light creates the deepest gladness of our present life. The same phrase will fitly describe the experience of the spirit as it comes forth from the unbelief, despair, and godlessness of its first unspiritual condition into the sunshine of God's assured forgiveness and fellowship, and the experience springing out of the last earthly act of faith as the spirit finds itself fresh folded to God's breast in everlasting love and welcome. These acts of faith, by which men

come to the Father in such widely different senses, are but first and last steps in the same pilgrimage. The journey is one. The points on the road only differ. The same term will cover the extremes without any distortion of its meaning. The nectar is one. Here it is drunk from coarse, common cups of clay ; there, from cups of gold and crystal and precious stone. Here we must needs climb laboriously to reach it, and, because our hands are palsied by sin and manifold infirmities, many a precious drop is spilt before we raise it to the lips. There it flows in exhaustless rivers, and no intervening infirmities can come in to defeat our yearning or abridge our rapture. Here to worship the Father requires an effort of the will ; there it will be the most restful attitude of the spirit. Through the course of our earthly history the things of the senses absorb us, and the things of the spirit gleam upon us now and again like some background of mountains through the fitful haze. There the things of the spirit will form the solid, unmistakable foreground, and the things of the senses be discerned like some inconstant background by the steadfast straining of the perceptions. The function of the faculties will be transposed. What are objects of perception now will be objects of reflection then, and what are objects of reflection now will be objects of perception then. The essential employment of the spiritualized nature is identical under all conditions. Here it is attended with effort ; there it will be spontaneous. Christ was returning to the bosom of the Father, to carry out the work initiated in the ministries of earth. He was consummating the worship presented here. The chain of spiritual consciousness was an unbroken chain. In following its onward links He seemed all but insensible to the outward scenes the chain traversed in its course. The environments that might surround His life on earth or in heaven were uncounted trifles in comparison with His own inner life of fellowship with the Father.

How successfully the Apostle Paul seems to grasp this continuity that binds together all stages in the history of a devout and believing soul ! No dizzy visions of interposing space, and separating worlds, and weary pilgrimages of the spirit through the dim and the unknown, obtrude themselves upon his imagination. "Called," "justified," "glorified"—three simple and co-ordinated steps in God's process of bringing men to Himself, bound to each other by certain though unseen ties, like the tie that binds the dayspring to the noonday, and root and blossom and fruit into one.

And again how the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, in one of his closing climaxes, seems to bring heaven right home to us ! Up to the very eve of His death, Christ had kept up those symbolic barriers that fenced the mount of God from human touch. "Ye cannot follow Me now." That does not merely mean, the good providence of the Father has determined that you cannot lay down your lives in the one appointed hour in which I lay down Mine. It means, the great crisis on which I verge must first be passed ; the new and living way must be opened in My person. The light of God must be shed upon Me, your priestly representative, before it can fully irradiate your lives in the outer courts. Your coming to the Father in the boldness of filial faith and love is inseparably dependent upon My return to the Father in the power of the new relationship undertaken in the cross. As I pass upward, there shall be a simultaneous movement throughout all the ranks of humanity. New vantage ground shall be reached. For the present you must wait at the old standpoint. "Ye cannot follow Me now." But the cross has made all that obsolete. The old and awful barriers have vanished like mist in the sunrise, and the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews exclaims, "Ye are come unto Mount Zion" ; not *shall*, but "*are* come." All God-loving and God-serving life, patriarchal, Jewish, Christian, angelic, life in heaven above and life in earth below, has been merged into one. "Ye are come unto Mount Zion, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and Church of the firstborn, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant."

Do we not detect *an accent of compensation* in the words of the text ? "Ye cannot follow Me now." And yet it is not by His hand that this grace is withheld. "Even now you may have the earnest of the rapture into which I am so soon to rise, for it is the Father's purpose to give you a living union with Myself. Look upon Me, and behold the Father. In His presence is fulness of joy. In Me you touch that presence, and may at once participate in that joy. There is no higher heaven than that which consists in loving fellowship with the King of heaven, and I can open the golden gate of that fellowship for you now. Do not suppose you must tread the thorny path I tread before you can see Him. I tread it as your substitute." "I am the way, the truth, and the life."

By the phrase "coming to the Father," we may say, in a word, Christ indicated the soul's believing approach to God, without dis-

tion of time or place. All the terms of the text must be explained with this in view. The *way* is related to our outward activities. These must find their true plane in Jesus Christ. The *truth* makes its appeal to the intellect of man. The faculties of the intellect must attach themselves to Him "in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." The spirit is the fount into which *life* flows, and life in all its perpetuity of blessedness is received through the spirit knit into mystic union with the spirit of Jesus Christ. Men are viewed as respectively separated from the Father, ignorant of the Father, dead to the Father. The three terms, "the way," "the truth," "the life," answer to three things they displace from human history, *wandering, error, death*. Let us pass these expressions under rapid review.

Christ is the way, for He recovers man from his godless wandering. The metaphor views man in the light of his practical obliquities. He is estranged by wicked works from the filial fellowship in which the life of Jesus Christ was unchangeably centred. A few false and fatal steps have served to separate him from the fountain of eternal good. Every proud, unaided effort he may make to return only increases the intervening distance. Man and his Divine Father are lost to each other, moving in diametrically opposite planes. The Father mourns the alienated trust, love, and service of His rebellious child. The child no longer feels the rest, strength, rapturous awe once realized in the manifested presence of the Father. All the restlessness of ambition and all the disappointment that lurks in achieved success, all the fever that burns in the gold-hunt, and all the sickness of heart that leads man, after he has exhausted the last ambition on his programme, to lie down and long to die, are the inarticulate complaints of this bitter orphanhood. Sin hides the Father's face. It sweeps us on its mighty and insidious current beyond reach of the Father's house. A way is that which connects the distant and inaccessible. Traversed as is our own land in every possible direction by the highways of commerce and civilization, we perhaps scarcely feel the force of this figure. Poor Livingstone, who waded waist-deep through pestilential marshes for weeks, to die at last in a miserable hut by the lake shore; the traveller, who has to cut his way for hundreds of miles through tangled forest and jungle at the rate of half a mile a day; the emigrant, who has to cross the trackless alkali plain, and who may perish midway; the military commander, who has to carry his forces over mountains, some sections of which are almost perpendicular,—know how a well-engineered path is the

first condition of successful movement. A way is that which makes movement in some specific direction possible. Movement towards God is impossible without the work of Jesus Christ the Mediator. Jesus Christ brings together in His own person the two most distant objects the whole circle of the universe can contain, God dwelling in unapproachable light, and man wallowing in guilt, worldliness, transgression. Christ subverts and destroys the work of sin in human nature, and makes progress towards God possible to us once more. In Him the alienated are brought back into relations of gentleness, endearment, and obedience. In His work and person the contrite child and the forgiving Father are made to meet each other. Astronomers tell us that, inconceivably vast as is the distance of some of the fixed stars, there is no point in the universe to which the influence and attraction of our sun does not extend. Christ's mediating and restoring influence overflows every circle of conscious life, and touches the last extreme of degradation. Whilst here upon earth He entered the homes banned by selfish respectability and pride, and cheered the abject outcasts with His friendship, to establish an abiding sacrament of the truth, that the way established in His work and person was accessible from the darkest standpoints of human sorrow and shame; and that whilst leading on in its upward course to the height of the Father's glory, it stretched down in its beneficent helpfulness to the last inch of earth touched by the foot of the most distant and daring wanderer from God. The metaphor is not fatalistic. It does not teach salvation apart from human endeavour. The way, however perfectly prepared, does not float the traveller to his destination like the tide. It makes movement possible. It is through faith in Christ that our works become acceptable, and all the activity of our spirit and our life rises into a sublime progress towards God. "I am the way."

Christ is the truth, for He recovers man from his godless error. The metaphor looks upon man from his intellectual side. Men are estranged from God in their thinkings, "alienated from the life of God by reason of the ignorance that is in them." Christ answers our intellectual need. "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father." Scientific truth puts us into intelligent relation with the world of established scientific fact. Historic truth puts us into intelligent relation with the facts that have determined the growth of particular types of government and civilization. Sociological truth puts us into intelligent relation with the facts that have moulded the social life of mankind. Jesus Christ puts us into intelligent

relation with all the vital facts of God's being and nature and government. He is the only possible word by which God can address Himself to a world of sinners. No intellectual activity, no induction of reason, no range of research can fill up this chasm in the mind of man. We can only know God as we give ourselves up to Jesus Christ, and suffer the energy of His spirit and presence to rule us. He is made unto us the wisdom by which we come to the saving knowledge of God. All knowledge that lies outside this sphere of contact with Christ is at the very best but adroit guess-work. When Christ asserts that He is the truth, He means more than the fact that He comes to us as our teacher and prophet to instruct us in the deep things of God. He is the teacher and the subject taught in one. Christ might well have said: "You regard Me as the mere storehouse in which truth in its various forms is laid up for men, or at most as the appointed channel by which Divine truth is communicated to men. You approach Me with your curious questions. Your questions, if answered according to your methods and expectations, would lead you away from the essential substance of the truth itself. You ask for propositions: I give you Myself. You aspire to see God: I am His image. You long to fathom His mystery: His deepest mystery proclaims itself in Me. You ask about the inscrutable hereafter: learn it from My care for you. The same love that ministers to you now shall minister after the event of death has come. 'I go to prepare a place for you.' I hold your destinies in My grasp, and you will apprehend them by apprehending Me. My care for your present and your future welfare is, after all, but the Father's care in Me. In My vicarious love the deepest secret of the Father's heart is laid bare. Yield yourselves without a fear to Me, and you shall know more of your coming destiny than the glowing allegories of babbling rabbis can teach you. All you need to know of God and His government and will, of the deep-veiled future and its unborn issues is in Me. 'I am the truth.'"

Christ is the life, inasmuch as He raises men from their godless insensibility and death. The ideas deepen as they succeed each other. Knowledge passes into life. "This is life eternal, to know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent." If the true and the full knowledge of God is in Jesus Christ, the life that is linked with that knowledge must also have its springs in His person. He is the great life-Centre. "As the Father hath life in Himself, so hath He given to the Son to have life in Himself." He stands forth in the midst of the universe to counterwork

the disintegration and decay that set in when the tie binding all life to its first Centre was ruptured by transgression. Jesus Christ brings us back into the grace and favour of God's presence, and that is the pledge that sin is forgiven, the penalty annulled, and the contrite transgressor restored to a joyful immortality. In our renewed fellowship with God through Jesus Christ, we pass beyond the dominion of spiritual death, and the physical change that once typified that death becomes as innocuous as the dropping of the blossom from the enlarging fruit. Communion with the Father seals to us an immortality that is altogether benign. Our shrinking at death will be best cured by the Divine love and friendship of which Jesus the Mediator is the minister in our hearts. "I am the life."

In this declaration is there not an emphatic rebuke of the faithless questionings of the disciples? This last term is meant to answer their distracting fears. Christ had often spoken of Himself as the life. Indeed this is the one ruling and harmonizing thought in those discourses preserved for us by St. John. Christ our life. Once before Christ had spoken of Himself as the life in the presence of the grave. "I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in Me, though he have died, yet shall he live." The standpoint so far was retrospective. The mystery had been solved for him over whom they mourned, and the grave had closed upon its victim. The words were a promise that Lazarus should one day be redeemed from the corruption in which he was held. But words now follow which have a prospective reference. The whole experience of death shall be changed for the future believer, and the very name shall be blotted from the language of the Christian Church. "He that liveth and believeth in Me shall never die." No new pilgrim to the realms of the unseen stood in need of the consolation then, and the words would seem to have been half forgotten in the commotion with which Lazarus was welcomed back to life. But not many days have passed, and the Master Himself is confronting death. The attention of all is strained towards this mystery. Possibly the disciples are thinking that they themselves may fall in the battle, and that without the presence and cheering word of their leader and guide.

We may do Thomas an injustice, if we look upon his question as one of idle speculation only. Deep, solemn, personal interest probably mingled itself with the misgiving of this inquiry. "Oh that all the dark corners, and the devious windings, and the horrible descents of the pathway were lit up for us! If we only knew

the terrors that lie hidden in these pitch-black glooms! What is this change from which we start with a fear and a pain we are helpless to repress? Whither does it sweep its victim? Wouldest Thou, Master, only pourtray for us the hidden incidents of the mystery, then might we be bold to plunge with Thee into the darkness. 'We know not whither Thou goest, and how can we know the way?'"

The term "life" seems to address itself with a significant emphasis to the disciple of unbelief. "Wherefore these misgivings? Why quail in spirit before the mystery? I am soon to bear it for thee, and the wrath Divine that once brooded in the incident of death need never touch thee. I have all power, and to doubt of thy well-being in the mortal struggle is to doubt Me. 'I am the life.' Knit to Me, thou shalt find thy spirit brought into such relation with the Godhead, that when thou shalt come to put off thy flesh, thou shalt not tremble in uncertainty, wondering what new destiny is to be assigned thee. By participation with Me thou shalt receive thine immortality even now. It is not after traversing some terror-haunted chasm that thou shalt find thy heaven. Thou shalt find it here. United to Me, thy life is lodged too high for corruption to touch it. Death shall be a stingless thing. A momentary shadow shall come, and thou shalt rise through the thin shadow into the everlasting light of God. My love shall never cease its hold of thee, and the life communicated to those incorporated into a believing discipleship with Myself shall never intermit its quickening power till they have lifted thee into the bosom of the deathless Father Himself. 'I am the life.'"

Union with Christ our everlasting life will guard against the shock and sting and disability of death. The man who is sailing under trustworthy captainship, and in company with genial friends, out of one zone into another, is scarcely conscious of the lines of demarcation over which the ship glides. So with the man who lives and dies in fellowship with Christ. Throughout the months of summer, darkness is unknown in the latitudes of the far north. The rising and the setting suns blend their light without the handbreadth of a shadow between. Tourists are all eager to visit the "Land of the Midnight Sun." It seems to me that for the man who is vitally united to Christ, the event of death is very much like that. He sails through the quiet, solemn seas of the midnight sun, and before the light of the earthly life has quite gone the light of a nobler sunrise has come to blend with it. In the solemn crisis of transition, for the man who has become one with Christ his Life,

no darkness deepens, and the shadow of the grave marks the day-spring.

But do not those who live in most vivid fellowship with Christ sometimes taste the bitterness of death even as others? We shall best answer the question by thinking of a profound distinction I once heard from the lips of a dying saint, in a comparatively obscure sphere of life. He had suffered a three months' martyrdom of pain before entering into rest. Said the man in one of his distressing paroxysms: "I often tell my friends that the fear of death is taken away. I can meet it without a tremor. But I often tell them also, I do dread the sharp and jagged pathway that leads down to death." Death and pain are two widely different things. Death is abolished by Him who is our life. You do not see death when you watch with half-breaking hearts the last struggles of your friends. That is encountered in the sphere of the unseen, into which only the conquering spirit of Jesus can come.

These words should correct all our speculative misgivings upon the subject of death. Human nature has still to fight its way through the old problems, and the querulous spirit of Thomas often asserts itself in our hearts: "Lord, we know not whither Thou goest, and how can we know the way?" The after life is sometimes spoken of as an unlighted gulf. The people influenced by this spirit hold an exaggerated estimate of the revelations to be made by death. They speak of the departed as those who have gone to learn the mysteries of the unknown. They find a morbid fascination in the half-pagan twilight created by the use of abstruse phraseology. They tremble before "the infinitude of silence" that lies beyond the grave. In people, again, with no pretension to metaphysic, this temper of speculative misgiving betrays itself in the suspicion that the soul's destiny may, after all, be determined upon purely arbitrary lines. The moral signs in the soul's present life may mislead. The breath of Christ in the soul and the out-working Spirit of Christ in the life are not accepted as the certain sign of union with the deathless Lifegiver. An old lady once tried to comfort a boy whose father had just died in these somewhat dubious words: "Your father was a good man; everybody says so. I should think if anybody ever did go to heaven, he has surely gone." The impression conveyed to the boy's imagination was that heaven might have been prepared with as little foresight as some of the great wilderness buildings that are found in different parts of the country, and that generally bear the name of somebody's "Folly." It might perchance have to remain for ever un-

occupied for lack of suitable inhabitants. Some unexpected difficulty might confront a man on the other side of the grave who had walked all his days in the consistent and unblemished love of God. This is all the growth of a very defective type of religion, and Christ's words ought to have finally silenced this half-articulate scepticism. It is quite sufficient for us to enter "the way," and worse than useless to ask in tones of misgiving about the ultimate "whither." Receive Christ, and thou wilt know more about the "whither" than words can suggest. Suffer Him to show thee the wealth of tenderness that is in the heart of the Father, and thou wilt shudder no longer in prospect of the inscrutable future. "Union with the Father is paradise in its secret beginnings, and thou canst enter by Me into that hallowed union now. It is not death that has the high honour of bringing thee to God. Death is not to unlock to men new worlds of knowledge and sensation and experience. I am come to raise men into those new worlds now. Commit thyself to the way, and it will lead thee to the truth, and it will infallibly teach thee ; to the life, and it will quicken and everlastingly save thee."

Christ's words present *a corrective to all distracted faith*. He asks from His followers concentrated thought and attachment and expectation. They had sought a way outside Christ, though a way through whose mazes He was to guide them ; a truth outside Christ, though a truth the exposition of which was to come from His lips ; a life outside Christ, though a life of which His immortal reign was to be the seal and the defence. The purport of these words is, that they must seek their all in Christ. They must let their eye rest upon His person as the one centre from which all saving power, all teaching light, all quickening inspiration must come. Let this exclusive and absorbing trust sought by the Saviour from His disciples and from all men be yours and mine. All saving prerogative, all teaching wisdom, all ennobling inspiration, are gathered into His own person. Mark how in these words the Master leads on His disciples to faith in a Saviour unseen. The love of the disciples had been very apt to glide into an idolatry of Christ's human form. But all this is to be corrected by the fresh events that are at hand. Christ is the way, and yet a way about to be hidden by strange eclipse ; the truth, and yet the lips by which the truth had been addressing itself these three years past to the world are soon to be dumb in the sepulchre ; the life, and yet the form in which the life had been incarnate was about to fade in the mystery of darkness : He was the way, the truth, and the life in His

very dying. All these meanings are deepened, confirmed, and perfected in His passion. By successive steps the disciples are led on to faith in a Saviour unseen, and at last, when they see Him no more, "they rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory."

The text suggests a warning against all low and dishonouring views of the Saviour's work and person. In these words Christ expressly puts Himself between God and the souls of all mankind. What blasphemy in a mere creature! What an unwarrantable assumption if we are free to cast ourselves on the Divine Fatherhood without the intervention of a Mediator! What audacity of selfishness for a man to come in between the love of the great Father and His world of dying children! What a spiritual crime for a man to plant himself at the gateway of God's house, and wring homage for himself from every poor suppliant who comes crouching thitherward! Are you prepared to pronounce on Jesus Christ a condemnation of that sort? If not, you must accept Him as the Son of God and the Saviour of the world. "No man cometh unto the Father, but by Me."

"See that ye refuse not Him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused Him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from Him that speaketh from heaven!"

XII.

THE GOSPEL OF ABSOLUTION.

"And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven : and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven : and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."—*Matt.* xvi. 19.

"Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven : and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."—*Matt.* xviii. 18.

"Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them ; and whosesoever sins ye retain, they are retained."—*John* xx. 23.

A VISIT I once paid to one of the Buddhist monasteries in China will always form one of the outstanding recollections of my life. The monastery was near the summit of a famous mountain. After climbing for two hours through wood-clothed spurs of hill, amidst sharp thunderstorms, my ears were all at once bewitched by soft, solemn, long-sounding notes, that came stealing through the rain-dripping trees. The melodies of almost unearthly gentleness made a pleasing contrast to the harsh cracks of thunder that had just been startling me. The notes came swelling quietly and slowly through the woods, at intervals of twenty or thirty seconds like the pianissimos of some whispering archangel who haunted the glades with his invisible presence. I was not long in finding out that those chimes, the like of which I have never heard for sweetness, were the chimes of the monastery bell. When I reached the monastery, the priests told me that the great bell was sounded at intervals of half a minute day and night, year in and year out, that the rhythmic chime had never paused for centuries, that the cadence had filled the woods whilst dynasties had risen and fallen, and that at every reverberation of the bell some soul was set free from the pains of purgatory.

Of course we smile at the superstitious idea that a piece of mechanism of that sort, or even the lives of piety and abstinence of which it might be the vocalized expression, could open the gates

of the prison in which condemned souls are bound. And yet in large sections of the Christian Church we are told that a deliverance equally wonderful is wrought by ecclesiastical mechanism. Heads, that have been touched by hands that through a long series of heads and hands have been touched by St. Peter's hands, have poised within them a contrivance that propagates sound waves of very uncommon properties. The mystic syllables, "I absolve thee," are chimed forth, and souls are set free from a condemnation that is fast leading on to purgatory, or to something very much worse. I scarcely know which is the more incredible superstition.

The Church of Rome teaches it as a dogma, that the priest, in the right of his official position, irrespective of all questions of personal character or wisdom or passing mood, has power, after the due observance of certain rules, to acquit or condemn the soul submitted to his arbitrament. The Church of England doctrine upon the subject is a compromise. The form of Absolution in the public service is carefully guarded in its expressions. It pronounces forgiveness to those who sustain a certain character, and then asks for the grace necessary to realize that character. It does not presume to specify the individuals who belong or do not belong to the category. In the office for the Visitation of the Sick however the Absolution is pronounced in terms that seem to trespass upon the province of the Divine judgment, and savour of sacerdotal assumption. It is directed that after the penitent has made his confession the priest shall say, "I absolve thee from all thy sins, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." By not a few clergymen these forms of absolution are read in the sacerdotal sense. Perhaps the attitude of kneeling, in which the congregation is instructed to hear the Absolution, favours the sacerdotal sense. One of the most gifted preachers of the Established Church claimed, in a sermon preached not very long ago, that upon the doctrine of apostolic succession the Anglican Church holds a stricter and more unbending doctrine than the Church of Rome. And yet at the same time these forms are read by thousands of Evangelical and Broad Church clergymen without any tinge of sacerdotal assumption in their thought. In some cases perhaps too commonplace a significance is attached to these passages that are made the watchwords of priestly absolution. At one end of the scale we have the Broad Churchman, who tells us that in the form of absolution the clergyman, who represents the Church, which is humanity in its best ideal, proclaims to the sinner the forgiveness of his fellow sinners, and so makes it easier

for him to believe in the forgiveness of God on high. On the other hand, you have the High Churchman, who asserts, more than Balaam asserted, that he can bless or curse at any hour of the day or night in virtue of his office, and does not need to wait upon the special commandment and inspiration of God. The true interpretation of these much-debated texts lies between these two extremes. Let us try and feel our way to some correct and definite interpretation of these passages, and so guard ourselves against error. A passage of Holy Writ to which we attach no clear and definite significance is an empty house in which the devil of fatal error is always free to install itself.

Let us inquire, *What is absolution?* Is there any spiritual truth corresponding to the sacerdotal meaning of the expression? Does the term describe any reality in the sphere of evangelical thought and life? We will turn to the three passages of Scripture usually quoted in defence of the dogma, and see how far they sustain the theories of which they are made the watchwords. The little Galilean company is standing on one of the lower spurs of the Lebanon, amidst the pleasant rush and music of its countless brooks, with the grey walls of the Roman castle at Cæsarea Philippi in the distance. Peter has just made his great confession, and by his swift and far-reaching intuition has established his place as foremost man of the twelve. It was under these circumstances that this peculiar order of expression was first used by our Divine Teacher. After speaking of the supernatural knowledge that Peter had received from the Father, Christ goes on to announce the important relation of Peter, as the first possessor and witness of such knowledge, to the Church of the future. And then Christ advances a step, and speaks of a future gift of light and power and dominion to Peter that Peter should receive from His hand: "And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven." If we refer to another occasion upon which Christ used this metaphor of the keys, we shall find that Christ was accustomed to associate with the expression *knowledge and the specific power that come from knowledge* (Luke xi. 52). The reference here can only be to the knowledge that unlocks the gates leading into the kingdom of heaven. That was Christ's future gift to Peter. Putting this side by side with the fact that Christ had just been speaking of a knowledge of His own person and character that had been given to Peter, what can the knowledge that Christ would by-and-by give be but the knowledge of the Father, of which He was the only one spring and channel amongst men? It was through that

knowledge that Peter was to open the way for men into the kingdom of heaven. "To bind" and "to loose" was to teach and to rule in the kingdom of heaven, in harmony with the knowledge received from the Father. You will observe that the promise deals more immediately with *things*, not *persons*, with truths and duties, and not with human souls. The apostles dealt with souls as all other disciples of Christ deal with them, intermediately, through the truths and precepts on which the salvation of souls turned. The power of the keys, of binding and loosing, was in reality the power of knowing the essential truths of God's character and will.

And then we turn over two chapters in Matthew's Gospel that are separated from each other by a few months of time, and we find practically the same language, with the metaphor of the keys dropped from it, addressed to a much wider circle of disciples. In the latter version of the same words, you will find that the binding and loosing refers to that which is impersonal. "What things soever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven." No unconditional infallibility is ascribed in the passage either to the Church or its ministers. It declares its infallibility with special safeguards.

Go into an observatory, and watch some astronomer as he is following the transit of a star. His telescope is so adjusted, that an ingenious arrangement of clock-work is made to shift it with the transit of the star. His instrument is moving in obedience to the movement of the star in the heavens. But the clock-work does not move the star. The astronomer has made his faultless calculations; the mechanic has adjusted his cranks and pendulums and wheels and springs with unerring nicety, and every movement in the telescope answers to the movement of the star in the far-off heavens. The correspondence rests on knowledge. And so when the things that are bound on earth are bound in heaven. Every legislative counsel and decree and movement in a truly apostolic and inspired Church answers to some counsel and decree and movement in the heavens. But then the power of discerning and forecasting the movements of the Divine will and government rests upon the power of interpreting the Divine character and applying its principles of action, as that character is communicated to us by Jesus Christ.

You are giving a boy his first lesson in astronomy. You show him an orrery. You tell him that the central disc represents the sun, and the third from the centre the earth, and so on.

And then you ask him to turn the handle which puts all these metallic balls representing things in the heavens in motion. You say that every movement here is a counterpart of every movement in the skies. But unless the boy is very dull indeed he does not suppose he is actually turning the planetary system with this little handle. And yet if the machine be faultless in construction, whatever is done on earth is done in heaven. Whatever is bound here is bound yonder likewise. An ancient Chinese poem implies the sun and moon went very much astray in their courses because the Imperial Astronomer was addicted to tipping. Some sacerdotal pretensions rest upon an assumption equally grotesque and flattering to man's pride of power.

The words addressed to the apostles by Jesus Christ on the evening of His resurrection from the dead approach more nearly to what has been understood by the term "absolution" than the earlier utterances. Here the apostles are spoken of as dealing with the souls of men in direct judgment. In the preceding instances they have been viewed as dealing with souls through the instrumentality of the truth. Here the instrumentality falls more or less into the background, and the witnesses to Jesus Christ are viewed as justifying or condemning, saving or destroying men by the power of their word. "Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained. And yet, after all, this is but a more solemn and impressive form of the earlier statement. As the doctor takes the key of his drug store and selects from the specifics that are arranged around him he kills or makes alive. His key means a power of absolution. When it is first put into his hand he is entrusted with as solemn a responsibility as the Judge who pronounces death-sentences or the Home Secretary who presents a death-warrant to the sovereign for signature or recommends a reprieve. When he selects this drug, or looks upon that as hopeless to apply under the condition into which the patient has fallen, he is dealing with questions of life and death. And so Christ in His closing admonitions to the disciples teaches that they are not dealing with speculative truth only. The doctrine they are sent forth to disseminate is not, like the curious and trivial questions discussed by some of the rabbis, a matter that cannot possibly affect the spiritual well-being of a single human soul in the slightest degree. They are not following out questions that have a hypothetical value only. It is not for some idle debate in the groves that they are setting forth in the scanty outfit of couriers. They are commissioned to deal with

grave, spiritual destinies. "Whose soever sins ye remít, they are remitted unto them ; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained." The words imply that the truth the apostles shall preach to men in the crowd, as well as present to the individual in the course of their more private ministrations, is the truth by which men shall be judged in the day of Jesus Christ, and that the impression produced here and now under their preaching shall be confirmed then. The sphere of the apostle's ministry and the sphere of the final judgment shall be penetrated by the same moral laws and principles. We sometimes find that things that apply under the conditions of one age do not apply under the conditions of another. Acts done in one country may have no worth or validity if the doer of them goes to another. The principles to be set forth by the apostles in their relation to the collective or individual souls of men alike are universal, not local, of Divine and not human authority only, eternal and not temporary and terminable in their sanctions. "Whose soever sins ye shall remit shall be remitted unto them."

It will help us in our endeavour to reach just conclusions on this question, if we remember that the power possessed by the first messengers of the gospel was greater than the power possessed by its messengers now, and approximated more closely to the exclusive type of prerogative claimed by the modern sacerdotalist. The first possessors of a truth wield a more terrible power than their successors can expect to wield, when that truth has become widely known. The curative properties of certain drugs now used in medicine were once known only within certain families. The knowledge was kept a secret within these families for generations. The knowledge was a monopoly. Through that monopoly they had in many cases power of life and death. That knowledge diffuses itself through a hundred text-books over half the globe, and becomes accessible to any one who can read. The special power accruing to the first possessors of the secret through their monopoly has passed away. And so with the knowledge by which entrance into the kingdom of heaven was to be gained. That knowledge at first was the monopoly of the few who followed Christ. But that condition of things exists no longer. Unless you can make the gospel the family secret of a limited group of men, you cannot set up a doctrine of apostolic succession, and claim for the Christian priest a power of absolution possessed by the first apostles. If Peter himself could come into our midst, he would find his distinctive prerogative gone. That special knowledge which made him

an absolver of souls gifted with a prerogative of life and death, he would find the possession of little children in Sunday schools.

It is said that when the Earl of Essex was in high favour with Queen Elizabeth, she one day gave him a ring, accompanied by the request that if he should ever find himself in circumstances of trouble in which her help could avail, he would at once send that ring as the sign of his appeal to her good offices. She would then do everything in her power to aid him. Some time after he was arrested for rebellion, and condemned to die. Elizabeth signed his death-warrant, but waited with tears and solicitude for the return of the ring, that was to be the sign of his appeal to her clemency. The ring had been entrusted by the condemned earl to the Countess of Nottingham for delivery into the hands of the queen. The Countess kept back the ring, and suffered the sentence to be carried into effect. The ring gave her the power of remitting or retaining sin. To make the illustration serve the purpose for which we want to use it just now, we must suppose the Countess was the go-between for the transmission of the ring not from the condemned man to the queen, but from the queen to the condemned man, and for the ring we must substitute a password. The power of absolution in the evangelical sense is very much like that. The ring, or the password, is the truth through which the forgiveness of God must be carried home to anxious, sin-burdened multitudes. The apostles were first put in trust with that truth; but the truth becomes, in every fresh heart that receives it, a token or password that may be given to others. When we stand in the presence of those who are ignorant of the first elements of the gospel, we have precisely the same powers as were given at first to the apostles, the power of blessing or banning, of giving or withholding, of binding or loosing, of life or death. The relation is in no sense official within the Church. The parent is the absolver of the child whose heart he sets free from fear by declaring the good will of Jesus Christ, and the friend of the uninstructed friend who waits the clear gospel word.

But the question suggests itself, Does not this seem to imply that all saving truth must come to us in the way of direct apostolic dogma? We sometimes claim for Christianity that the perception of its chief truths is intuitional, and that Christ is a light lighting every man that cometh into the world. Does not this rigid teaching about the power of a disciple's witness to bind and loose conflict with that view? I would reply, in the first place, Christ contemplates in His words to the disciples the sphere within which they

were to exercise their ministry. He is not touching the case of the unevangelized heathen at all. For anything that He declares to the contrary, there may be a binding or a loosing going on in heaven that has respect to populations not touched by the apostles' ministry. In Christian lands, again, I take it that the perception of fundamental realities, and the response of assent within the heart when Christian truth is preached, are mainly intuitional, and the more so as we are removed in time from the ages of historic Christianity. But intuition has its limits. It can recognise the gospel as true when once proclaimed, but cannot create that gospel out of the void. It is capable of responding to the outward voice of the gospel, but not of forming that voice for itself from within. And here we part company with the Broad Churchmen in their view of absolution. Absolution is not the voice of a noble human forgiveness only, that helps men to believe in the Divine. That rests too much on the inherent goodness of human nature. It is not a fact that we believe in God's forgiveness because it is suggested and enforced by human forgiveness. The holy flame of forgiveness must come down from the Spirit of God in heaven before it can burn within human hearts on earth ; and it is of that we are heralds.

The power given by these words perhaps goes farther still, and implies, under certain extraordinary conditions, fitness and qualification to pronounce an unerring spiritual judgment upon the soul's relation to God. And this leads us to ask the question, Upon what conditions does this power of opening and closing the kingdom of heaven, and of retaining and remitting the sin of men, rest? You will observe, in the first case, nothing whatever was promised to Peter, except so far as he was already the subject of a teaching inspiration, and was to become so in a yet richer degree in future days. He held the keys, and could bind and loose in so far as the Son was revealed to him by the Father and the Father by the Son, and not one iota beyond. He could not open the gates of the kingdom by any private authority and apart from the possession of these truths. And then we come to the promise of this same power to the whole congregation of the disciples. There is no power of binding and loosing, you will observe, apart from Christ's indwelling presence within the Church. And then we come to the last case. Christ connected the power of absolution with a symbolic act, in which He made the disciples recipients of His own life, and partakers and instruments of the Holy Ghost by that fellowship. But it will be observed that there is no valid

retention or remission of sin that can be pronounced to men, except by the lips of which the Holy Ghost is the unceasing breath. Given that condition in the case of either priest or layman, and I am free to extend the province of absolution just as far as the most extreme sacerdotalist has ever sought to extend it. The *ideal Church* and the *ideal minister* may have all the power the sacerdotalists claim, but to assume that the Church and minister of to-day and every day is ideal in actual life and attainment, is to make a very strong demand upon our credulity indeed.

Snowdon is a mountain from which may sometimes be seen the Irish coast, the Isle of Man, the higher peaks of the Lake district and Cârdirgan Bay ; but a man might ascend Snowdon three hundred days out of the year without getting a view of that sort. I turn to my New Testament, and find that "he that is born of God doth not commit sin." The man who belongs to Christ possesses through that link of inheritance "all things," for he is Christ's and Christ is God's. An apostle is one who, when filled with the Holy Ghost, can pronounce unerring judgment upon a soul submitted to his judgment, as Peter pronounced judgment upon Ananias. I go out into the world, and look for the sinless saint. With what result ? For three hundred days in the year I may look, without getting anything more than a very vague and distant view of that interesting character. I go and ask to be pointed to the poor believer who has so given himself to Jesus Christ, and appropriated Jesus Christ for his own, that he has become the conscious possessor of all things, and lives in a sphere of perpetual conquest ; and I find it very difficult to get speech of such a man. The querulous saints who think that God has not dealt quite so bountifully with them as He might are plentiful enough. And I go and look for the minister who is so filled with the Holy Ghost that he becomes infallible in moral judgment, and always speaks the exact thought of God in acquitting or condemning men. And I scarcely know where to find the man who has been lifted by the inspiration of the Spirit above error. He is rarest of all within the ministries that claim this discriminating power as a prerogative of mere office. I come therefore to the conclusion that these are delineations of *ideal Christianity* ; not ideal in the sense that they are beyond the line of practical possibility, but ideal in the sense that they are realized only by an uncommon exaltation of soul.

We are not sure that Peter and his fellow apostles possessed these gifts in the same uniform degree of intenseness and at all times. The inspired seer from Teman blundered in seeking to

"bind and loose" Job. These powers are powers possible to God's servants through exceptional faith and spirituality, rather than permanent powers of office. You might just as well claim that a man who passes a day on Snowdon in a November fog can see the Irish coast and the hills of Westmoreland, as claim that any set of men, in virtue of their sacred rank, have the perpetual power of an unerring absolution. And if you claim that absolution is not unerring, that it asserts a principle that may or may not apply in the particular case, you might as well send a man to settle the question of his forgiveness by using the dice-box.

The question arises, *Who has the right to pronounce an absolution of this sort?* The sacerdotalist replies, The man who has received an ordination that is unbroken in the line of its succession from the apostles, with Peter at their head. Now I can understand that, in the absence of authentic documents certifying the historic facts upon which Christianity rests, a succession of that sort might be of value in accrediting a man who is to be witness of the historic facts of Christ's life. Before the Church had its completed New Testament canon, I can understand a man who had received his ordination from the apostles saying, "I am a duly accredited witness of the saving facts in the life and work of Jesus of Nazareth, for I have received my orders from an apostle who was one of the bosom-companions of Christ from the beginning." But a claim of that sort becomes a superfluity and an anachronism, when we have the writings of the apostles themselves; and it is possible for us to receive the word of absolution from an inspired pen as effectually as from an inspired lip. Moreover I see no more reason why the grace of the Spirit should run in geometrical lines, than why it should come to men who dwell in valleys rather than in hills, or to men with one colour of hair rather than another. And when we look closely into the passages under review, we find nothing whatever to sustain this figment of an episcopal succession.

The power committed to Peter is entrusted some few months later, not only to the apostles, but to each and every disciple who might chance to be offended by the wrong or transgression of another and who would be loyal to certain specified directions, as well as to the whole congregation of believers in their corporate capacity. And when we come to the last reference made by our Lord to this subject, we do not find the power of remitting or retaining sin communicated to the nine other apostles through Peter, but from Christ direct, thus intimating that the effusion of the Spirit, upon which this power was to be based, was an effusion that

was to be common to the apostolate and to the Church it represented. Christ was quite logical in the claim He made upon men's faith. He did not expect the people to believe that *He* had power on earth to forgive sin till He had given adequate proof of His authority by saying to the sick of the palsy, "Arise, take up thy bed, and walk." And if Christ did not expect men to believe that He Himself had power of absolution without giving miraculous proof of His claim, He will not expect us to believe it of men who claim the same power upon the basis of a technical form only.

The thorough-paced sacerdotalist demands confession as a preliminary basis for the absolution he utters. That demand is a tacit admission of the frivolity of his claim. It is just as though some thought-reader should boast that he would read the number of a banknote placed in a sealed safe, and ask first to be allowed to look at the cash-book of the firm through whose hands the note last passed, and in which a record was made of the number. If the priest cannot read the heart of the penitent without the help of his confession, he is still less able to read that Divine Heart, from whose secret judgments the absolution of the individual must spring. A genuine absolution must rest as much upon a correct interpretation of the mind of God to the individual, as upon the interpretation of the state of the individual mind itself. Indeed, no confession can supply an accurate basis for the utterance of an edict of absolution. The same acts may represent very diverse religious conditions in people of diverse knowledge, training, and experience. The God, who is a God of knowledge, and by whom actions are weighed, and He only, can read unerringly all the delicate factors in our spiritual state and condition, and pronounce the absolution that is unimpeachably and eternally judicial.

So far, however, as absolution deals with the proclamation of God's good will to the penitent, whoever is filled with the mind and spirit of Christ is free to proclaim it. The proclamation, resting as it ultimately does upon Christ's authority and that of His disciples, is just as good from one man's lips as another's, if he be spiritually qualified to reflect the mind of God. It is not the man who clothes the truth with the authority of his office. It is the truth that clothes the man with his authority as he utters it. News may not always come from the Government gazette, or be proclaimed by the town crier who fills an office that may have existed from the first incorporation of the town; and yet it may be good and trustworthy news notwithstanding. We can detect in these last words of Jesus Christ no wish to limit to a close guild the powers given

to the apostles. Indeed, a spirit of that sort would have been contrary to the universalism of the gospel. Christ could not die for men, and then wish to narrow into certain official channels the solemn proclamation of the forgiveness that was to be the fruit of His death.

The limitation of grace to narrow channels by sacerdotalism is a narrower and a more ignoble kind of Calvinism than that of the Puritans. They taught that Divine grace was characterized by rigid and terrible restrictions, but all that was for the glory of the Divine sovereignty. Some of the people who sneer at the narrowness of the Puritan creed limit Divine grace to equally contracted channels, and they limit it, not like the Puritans, for the glory of the Divine sovereignty, but for the honour and exaltation of a caste. A fountain has been opened in the house of David for sin and uncleanness. No gates or fences shut in the fountain. It is free and accessible as unploughed prairie or deep ocean upon which no one can put a mark and claim it for his own. But by this open fountain a man in vestments takes his stand, and says, "The water of the fountain can only cleanse you when I direct it upon you from my spray-dissipator."

It has been calculated that the amount of heat received from the sun in the course of a year is so great that if the earth were covered, from pole to pole, with an ice cap a hundred feet thick, the heat would suffice to melt away every atom of that ice heap. And the amount of heat our earth receives is but a trifle in comparison with the total volume given off by the sun. It is scarcely so much as a drop in the rainfall of a year. Our earth receives only one twenty-five-thousand-millionth of the heat the sun gives off year by year. God's forgiveness is as bountiful as that. From the burning depths of His great, unfathomed heart He is ever pouring boundless grace and incomprehensible compassion. His love is sufficient, not only to melt the sin from every human heart, but to melt the sin from as many worlds, if they needed it, as there are human souls in this ant-heap world of ours. Do not suppose that the warmth of God's forgiveness, before it can melt or transform our natures, must needs be gathered up into the burning-glass of some petty priest's insignificant absolution. God's warm love is pouring down upon you Sunday and week-day alike, without stint or condition other than that you will meekly and penitently receive it. You are not dependent upon the absolution of either the confessional or the enquiry room. The formal proclamation of forgiveness in the services of the Church might be well for an ignorant or an unlettered

age, but you know it all, and it is, thank God! a superfluous archaism for most of us. The watchman, as he calls from the walls of the eastern city, "The morning cometh," is a useful institution in countries where clocks are scarce, but you would think him an irritating superfluity if he were to exercise his vocation within sound of the town-hall clock, and were to continue his cries when the sun was high in the heaven. "The glory of the Lord hath arisen upon thee." You scarcely need the human form of assurance or absolution now. If you have heard it from the lips of God, the human voices that echo it will be a weariness and a discord.

XIII.

THE UNFULFILLED IDEAL.

“Thou didst well in that it was in thine heart.”—2 *Chron.* vi. 8.

THIS utterance is recorded only in Solomon's speech at the dedication of the temple. It seems uncertain whether God put those very words into the mouth of the prophet Nathan, or whether Solomon is summing up the commendatory portions of the Divine message to David when David was forbidden to build the temple. Whichever view we take, the passage will be equally instructive as an expression of God's mind, and authoritative as a basis of practical admonition for all time.

The *value of unfulfilled ideals* is the great lesson brought before us by this passage.

Before entering into the subject, it may be well to define the terms. In what sense do we use the word ideal? What do we mean by religious ideals, for it is only of religious ideals we shall speak? A religious ideal we may perhaps define as a product of sanctified imagination, and sanctified imagination we may again describe as faith considered in its free, intellectual expression. An ideal is the outline picture of possible usefulness and success, conceived under the incitements of faith, hope, and love inherent in the new life. It will be seen that in our religious ideals there is a double element—a Divine inspiration, and a form or image fashioned by the human intellect that has blended with it. An ideal that is born of pure religious life, and not of mere worldly ambition, is a child of God's inspiration in the second degree of descent. It is the breath of heaven united to a fallible human thought.

Every Christian worker has his ideals, and you will perhaps feel the force of this subject the more intensely if I ask you to recall

and keep in definite view the ideals you have cherished from time to time. The ideals cherished by God's people vary with the requirements of the age. David's was to build a temple ; ours probably concern the building of living stones into that peerless temple in which God shall be worshipped throughout all ages.

What fair and majestic ideals you had before you left your first love, and your heart had been embittered by the manifold disappointments of life ! There was first the ideal of what you would be in your work. You aspired to be a wise controversialist like Stephen, or an unfaltering witness to evangelical truth like an apostle fresh from the exhilarations of the Pentecost. You pictured yourself the possessor of a tongue of fire. In those pure and holy dreams of your early years, it seemed that you would open your lips only to find the Holy Spirit manifestly co-operating with your effort to sanctify the Church to nobler life, and draw the worldly crowds to sincere and abiding faith in Christ. You were perhaps appointed to watch over and build up a group of inexperienced and imperfectly-instructed Christians. You pictured them making rapid advance week by week towards strong, active religious manhood, never turning back to evil, but ever hungering and thirsting after God's life of perfect love. You pictured this group multiplying from time to time, and breaking up into new groups of equally active and earnest Christians. Or you were called to teach in the school. You pictured the children putting away the listlessness and superficiality peculiar to their years, and bending with strange eagerness to catch the lessons of love and comfort you drew from the sacred page. You seemed to see child after child consecrating the freshness of its youth to the Lord, and the class so electric with religious influence and vitality, that each new child put into it at once felt the spell of this blessed persuasion. Or perhaps you were working amongst the multitudes alienated from all outward forms of religious worship, and given up in many instances to profane and dissolute lives. You pictured glowing successes in the most hopeless and abandoned neighbourhoods, holy memories reviving in those who had lived in sheer swinishness, secularism and unbelief melting away before homely Christian love and appeal, and a little millennium coming like the dayspring to the wretchedness of slums and rookeries.

And then there was the ideal of what all this was to accomplish in the world. The generation that was to be more immediately influenced by your term of labour was to yield fewer neglecters of public worship needing to be coaxed by undenominational missions,

fewer drunkards to be a shame and a terror to the streets, fewer voluptuaries to plot against the innocent, fewer brutes and bullies to crush the happiness of home by selfishness and oppression. The Churches you were to influence were to be enlarging their borders by daily accessions from without, and to be perpetually growing in the best kinds of influence and authority. You will know now what I mean when I speak of our "religious ideals."

Is not this lesson, the value of unfulfilled ideals, a lesson we all need to learn? Only a slight fraction of the zeal that promised so much at first ever seems to bear visible fruit. We see the ideals of fellow labourers cut short by the act of God, almost before they have touched their coveted tasks. We are ready to say, "Why this waste of zeal and strength and love?" God wants to introduce the element of grace into our recompense, as well as into our first deliverance from condemnation, and to exemplify this grace He often cuts short the work of His servants, and rewards them for purpose as well as for accomplishment. The achievements of the best lives do not equal the measure of ardent aspiration, and God rewards for aspiration as well as for perfect deed.

And then there are ideals, the secret of whose frustration is to be found in our own hearts. We had perhaps miscalculated our strength, and unforeseen obstacles arose to crush down into complete collapse those noble conceptions of toil and triumph we once had. Pride mingled with our ideals, and God was holding us back from their realization till pride had been extinguished, and faith and hope and humility had grown to proportions commensurate with the success He was about to give us. But we do not understand the meaning of God's delays, and we visit our disappointment and impatience upon our early ideals, and mutter gratuitous confession about inexperienced zeal, and youthful hallucination, and pious castle-building. And so our ideals of work and obligation and evangelistic success have been relegated to the lumber room, and have been lying there in ignoble dust and dry-rot for years; and God, who counts these ideals amongst the most precious jewels in His earthly treasury, alone knows the loss sustained by His work as well as by our own souls.

A famous traveller has written a book to tell us how remunerative the abandoned gold-fields of Midian may yet become. Some of the most productive silver mines of South America are mines that were worked by Spanish conquerors, forsaken for two and a half centuries, and are now being worked again. Boundless spiritual wealth and possibility lie hidden in the half-forgotten ideals of our

youth and early manhood. A man is offering for sale some portion of his estate that he considers almost valueless. A possible purchaser is in negotiation with him. At this juncture a mining engineer of established sagacity and reputation is said to have been looking very closely at the land with evident interest and appreciation. Upon hearing this the owner is of course very anxious to break off his negotiations, and to reassert his title. If the subject before us only gives us to feel the high value God attaches to our accomplished aims, if we can get an insight in any degree like His into the worth of the unfulfilled ideal, we shall want at once to reassert the ideal as our own, and work it out with the growing strength and experience of our matured religious life.

I. Consider the influence exerted by the unfulfilled idea upon the *personal character*.

Perhaps no mind is so purely subjective in its constitutional habit and tendency, that the process of its sanctification can be carried on through the relations that subsist between itself and God alone, without intermediate relations with the outside world. If such a case of sanctification should now and then occur, we could only call it a miracle amongst miracles. As a rule, the mind has been so profoundly influenced by the social relations and surroundings in which it has been cradled, and has become so "objective" in its character, if we may use the uncouth word of the metaphysicians, that the process of sanctification can only be carried on in a sphere of tangible work, or at least of vivid spiritual sympathy with work where circumstances make practical co-operation impossible. Work implies an ideal; for work without an ideal is simply mechanism wearing itself out by its own friction, and accumulating no benefit for itself in the process. It is just conceivable that religious life may exist without the help and influence of ideals, but it will only be marked by feebleness and insipidity. It will find its appropriate emblem in the dead level of the prairie rather than in the towering majesty of the forest. How shall religious capacity grow, if the heart cherish no ideals of faith and unselfish love and labour, out towards which religious capacity can stretch itself? The moment you give up your large ideals you cease to feel the necessity for large sacrifice, large heroism, generous self-forgetting toil. The sense of your obligation will at once contract. Let go your ideals, and the proportions of your religious character will shrink, and its whole groundwork be lowered. A man begins to go down from the very moment he gives up his ideals.

An ideal occupies precisely the same relation to religious growth and power that the faculty of imagination in the child does to the character and success of the after man. Picture if you can a childhood from which the imagination has been completely struck out,—a childhood that is without yearnings, ambitions, or enchanted dreams,—a childhood that before it has reached its teens has all the weariness and languor of the played-out voluptuary in its tone. Biographies of successful men awaken no single ripple in the mind. The possibilities of wealth and distinction possess no power to charm. No after-life of success is projected. How could such a childhood amass force for meeting the engagements and duties and difficulties of life? Illustrations of the destiny to which such a childhood would lead are unfortunately to be found in connexion with our parish workhouse system. Students of social science tell us that the education provided in the parish workhouse supplies no element to stimulate the imagination of the child, and that the little ones placed under the *régime* grow up dull, sullen, void of interest in everything about them, and without a single ambition to improve themselves. In the course of time, after every potential interest and aspiration has been battered down and deadened, the child is turned into the world ; and it is almost invariably found that, after a few years of indolence, stolidity, and mild crime, the child returns to the workhouse to shelter its incompetency and approaching age. At least that was the state of things not very long ago. The faculty of the imagination was unfed in childhood, and very often died out. And when that took place, there was no impulse left that could carry up the child from its own level of life to a more genial and stately level.

Let imagination be denied its proper function in the religious life, and the result will be to limit that life to a very low and abject plane. The professor of religion who is without an inspiring ideal is spending the life of a creeping, torpid, spiritual pauper. We are degraded when we once surrender our ideals of work, and there is no power left that can carry up our life to those nobler levels that rise before us in “steps of infinite progression.”

It would be comparatively easy to show how all our religious virtues gain or lose, as our ideals of religious work are grasped or abandoned ; but as faith is the root and representative of all other virtues, it will perhaps suffice if we illustrate it by this one particular quality.

There is a *logical impediment to the growth of faith* in the heart of the man who has given up his ideals. Not only did he let go

a world of faith in God when he abandoned his ideals, but he established cast-iron limitations in his own mind that his faith can never overpass. He tells you that he has been thwarted so often in the accomplishment of his ideals, that he has resolved to give up hoping for this end and straining forward to that. He has made up his mind to go on doing his common daily duty, and to take whatever success may come without any highly coloured expectation of it, and be thankful. Let us suppose, if it be possible in such a case, that it is the will of the Spirit of God to inspire a special degree of faith in that man's heart, and to vouchsafe a success to his work commensurate with his enlarged faith. The suggestion comes to him like the wind blowing where it listeth: "Except that the power of God will overshadow you in your work to-day, and that poor, impotent natures will receive perfect soundness in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. Expect as you go to your appointed task of instructing the young, or of comforting the sick and the heavy-laden, or addressing the gospel of life to the ignorant and profane, that this day will not be altogether as other days. Look for the tear where you had thought penitential relenting the least probable. Listen for the tremulous inquiry and the confession of sin, where you had hitherto expected only silence, inattention, contempt." How does the man meet this suggestion, that the very Spirit of God, in its faith-creating prerogative, may be bringing home to his soul? "These high-flown dreams are altogether in the face of my present theory. I gave up that style of thing long ago. I had put up my standard into the topmost blue, but fell so pitifully short of it, that I at last resolved to go on doing what little I could, without aiming at impracticable standards. The most glowing pictures of what I was to accomplish filled my imagination. I waited and waited and waited still, and nothing came, so at last I resolved to work without fixed ideals, and to take just what success came in my way, and be thankful." It is a psychological impossibility for faith to get into such a soul. The Spirit of God cannot put it there, unless He first blot out the man's personality and create something altogether new in its place. All the faculties are in a dead-lock, and till the man himself can see and repair the defect no expansive principle can be introduced. By casting off his ideals he has put an intellectual limitation upon his faith, and it is hard to see how faith, cramped by these adamant conditions, can live at all, either in its personal or vicarious aspects. And when faith is gone the heart shrivels into pitiless blasted desert.

But some one may be ready to say: "This is justification by works. From my standpoint at least this necessary connexion between personal and vicarious faith is not obvious. A man may have faith in the Divine power which is carrying on the work of sanctification in his own soul, and yet have given up those ideals which are perhaps to some extent the intellectual expression of his faith in God's power to touch and transform the hearts of men at large."

All faith is twofold in its action, personal and vicarious, and the one type of action can no more go on without the other, than the systole can be separated from the diastole in the action of the heart. The two kinds of faith are counterparts, and decay in the faith you exercise on behalf of the world will bring decay in the faith exercised on your own behalf. Can you not see that personal apart from vicarious faith is not faith but a species of self-righteousness? You have unlimited faith in God's power over your own heart, but not over the hearts of men at large. That is to say, you trust in God's power, plus those exceptionally happy and tractable elements which are found in your own personal disposition and character. In plain English it comes to this: you trust in yourself and despise others; you are self-righteous. The difficulties we meet in realizing our ideals in the world are just the same as the difficulties we meet in realizing our ideals in the realm of our personal life; and if we lose faith in the possibility of the one, we shall lose all true faith in the possibility of the other. Hence it is that in genuine revivals of religion, the sanctification of believers and the conversion of the ungodly always proceed by equal paces. There is vital relation between the two, and the one helps the other. It may be questioned whether the process of a man's sanctification has set in at all, if his faith is only concerned with personal questions. Faith must grow, through those broad and unselfish ideals we set before us in our work and prayer. This is one of the ways in which faith works by love. When we burrow on like mere moles in our work, without any clear and intelligible idea of the end we hope to accomplish, saying to ourselves the thing which hath been is that which shall be, we limit both God's work and our own by the small achievements of the past, and shut out the Divine law of progress from the realm of our activity. Hold to your ideals. Religious life must shrink where there is no daring ideal of anticipated achievement. An ideal, if deferred in its fulfilment, or even unfulfilled in the precise form in which you first conceived it, will be a perpetual fountain of health and prosperity to your own soul.

When the martyred souls in the Apocalypse were crying out for the accomplishment of one of the great epochs there delineated white robes were given unto them, that they should rest awhile. Though the consummated ideals for which you are crying and stretching out your hands are deferred, yet rest assured the ideal itself and the life of prayer and labour centred in it, shall not be unrewarded. Your soul shall be clad with the white garment of perfected purity and praise, and comforted by God's pledged word and oath, you shall rest in unutterable peace, till the end sweep in that shall more than fulfil your boldest anticipations of power and victory.

Doubtless the whole character of David was raised and ennobled by the ideal he had so long cherished within his heart. The secret conception may have chastened his fierceness through years of battle, and when at last it was revealed that the completion of his noble plan must be delayed, what a spring of prayer, unselfishness, and thanksgiving it opened up within him ! How it unlocked the very heavens, and disclosed God's grace and favour descending from the heights of glory and encircling the long line of his family and descendants as with the splendour of the shechinah cloud, till at last the old man's heart could contain itself no longer, and he breaks out, "Who am I, O Lord God, and what is mine house, that Thou hast brought me hitherto? And yet this was a small thing in Thine eyes, O God ; for Thou hast also spoken of Thy servant's house for a great while to come." This ideal, and the prayers that were its life-breath, may have helped to purge the blood of battle from the robes of the white-headed warrior and mellow his old age for the skies, as he sat musing in his house of cedars. The holy ambition may have carried the heart of David from his contemplated temple up to the overshadowing God, till the Divine lovingkindness seemed to shed down all its wealth of comfort upon his fading life ; and though he saw not the glory that came to fill the Temple, he had visions of the Lord Himself, and exclaimed, "Because God is at my right hand I shall not be moved."

Do not despise or discard your ideals ; for if even unfulfilled ideals thus cause us to grow, God esteems them in the same degree as He values the soul, and yearns to win its love and honour to Himself. He thinks of them as agencies that are step by step bringing the heart of the child right up to the heart of the Father. Can the earthly father ever slight the agency or educational process that has revolutionised the tastes and pursuits of an unsympathising child, and qualified it to enter into the father's pursuits

and to become his bosom companion? Our ideals, sober or visionary, accomplished or unaccomplished, whatever else they do, are taking our thoughts step by step to those thoughts which are higher than ours, even as the heavens are higher than the earth. If you cannot see the worth of your unfulfilled ideals, God who traces their influence upon character, can; and if the inward ear were not heavy with the world's distracting Babel, you would hear the testimony of His favour and approval, "Thou didst well that it was in thine heart."

As you value the well-being and prosperity of your own souls, cleave to your ideals. You cannot rise without them. Never weigh against your moral and spiritual interests the temporal sacrifices you make for your ideals. Do not think regretfully of the untimely death that sometimes overtakes God's youthful servants as they go forth to their sacred service in the grand enthusiasm of a life-sur-rendering consecration. They have gained in character indefinitely more than they have lost in length of days upon earth. The sacrifices that seemed almost cruel in their severity, judged from our standpoint of unbelief, have been repaid by a moral sublimation and refinement, in comparison with which, the world with all its glitter of wealth and whirl of pleasure, is but as the dust of the summer threshing-floor.

But this is selfish doctrine. Is there nothing better in store for us? If God values our ideals only because of their educating influence upon the heart of the elect few, and ignores the wide world contemplated in those ideals, is not His name miscalled Love? There is much more to be told.

II. These ideals *move the mind of Almighty God*,—the mind from which all enduring fulfilment and blessing must come.

The ideal touches with some lasting impression the unforgetting God, and passes into one of the abiding motive-forces of the universe He governs to redeem. Great events move upon invisible pivots, the aspirations and prayers of God's hidden few. In the last great day of light and revelation, when all the secret springs of the universe shall be uncovered, it shall be seen that the men who were accounted visionaries were the men who were directing the largest amount of force upon the life of the universe, and that the very ideals that earned for them the reputation of fanatics were ideals that God took home to His own heart, informed with His own almightiness, and put back upon the earth to be enshrined in the history of all after time.

There is a spiritual doctrine of the conservation of energy which

is the heritage of all the true people of God. The theory has found favour with scientific men in recent years that no force can die out. It simply changes its form. The force that projects the stone into the air does not cease when the stone comes back to the ground. The friction caused by its arrest generates heat, and heat is a mode of motion. Though the heat may have passed into regions where we can no longer trace it, the sum of force going out from the acting muscle is unchanged in amount.

And so, when Providence puts its arrest upon the progress of our ideals, every fraction of the force lives on. It passes perchance into a more subtle form, and directs its influence upon a more vital spot than it could touch under its first conditions. Blessed doctrine of the conservation of energy ! David held some clue to it when he exclaimed, "Are not my tears in Thy book?" Christ was recognising it when He spoke the words that immortalised Mary's love : "Whosoever this gospel shall be preached, there shall also this that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her." The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews felt it when he exclaimed, "God is not unrighteous to forget your work of faith and labour of love which ye have showed toward His name." No prayer is forgotten ; no consecration without its influence, although the consecrated strength may not be accepted for actual service. God will be pre-eminently tender of the ideals whose accomplishment He defers by some providential check of His own. We need not pour out despairing lamentations on behalf of those whose power of carrying out their ideals has been paralysed by the direct stroke of God. We need not weep over the sad memorials of disappointed zeal and arrested service in our missionary graveyards, and of which, indeed, the broken shaft in every graveyard reminds us. That force has all gone up into God's keeping. Every tear is treasured above. We can track the spiritual force no longer, but do you fear that it is quenched? Has it rushed into perpetual oblivion? Has it reached a stage of absolute and everlasting quiescence? No ; it must live as long as there is a God in heaven to hear prayer, record consecration, and knit up all pleading sympathies into that last grand throb of force which shall make all things new, and bind heaven and earth into one by Christ Jesus. The value of your ideal can only be measured against the high spiritual values of the golden future that is coming to the universe. "Thou didst well that it was in thine heart."

But there is God-moving force in our own keeping, about which we do well to be concerned. Though we need not be anxious about

the strictly providential limitations put for a time upon our ideal, there are moral limitations about which we ought to think with all seriousness,—limitations growing up out of our weakness. Of course these limitations are providential in one respect, the arrest comes as a part of the all-wise and sovereign government of God ; the ultimate reason for it however is not to be found in God's heart, but our own. You are perhaps saying, you cannot feel that your ideals have ever been of any account to God or moved His heart in the slightest degree. You are ready to ban your ideals, or at least to throw them to the winds. But God sees in them a power that can be so developed and purified as to touch and move Him, and He secretly commends them. How is this power to be brought out and applied? It must perchance be stimulated and increased by temporary delay. Have you never felt any onesidedness in the action of your ideals? Have they not stimulated the power of work without at the same time stimulating the twin power of prayer? Do not be rash and cast away your ideals. The check is divinely significant. But for this you might forget the subtle force of prayer, and spend your lives in the exercise of the lower force of labour. You thrust on this side, and smite on that, and accomplish nothing. God seems to confound you, and you are ready to give up all ideals in your vexation and impatience. See you not that God wants you to drop the rude staff, and take up the jewelled weapon of all-prayer? It may be, if you are still blind to His meaning, He will roughly smite the staff from your hand, and put in its place the jewelled sword. Try and understand the motive of these temporary limitations. Is it not to cast you more fully upon God? What frightful infidels we should become if we saw our ideals leap up to immediate completion at our mere touch, as by a process of rapid tropical growth ! Our ideals, though born of faith, are not always suffused and surcharged with an ever-growing spirit of faith. At times they are little better than the fossilized faith of bygone years. When our ideals are postponed in their accomplishment, it is that faith may be made perfect. God does not despise your ideals. "He despiseth not the sighing of the contrite heart"; much less will He disesteem the brave aspirations of your religious manhood. He counts the tears of selfish grief; much more will He number the tears of unselfish love. Your ideals in their weakness and incompletion have already touched Him. "Thou didst well that it was in thine heart." If you can only understand and enter into the Divine will, they shall move Him more profoundly still, and through Him shall touch and move the world.

You lose power over the mind of God when you begin to throw away your ideals. Even the ideals that are compounded with grains of earthly grossness embody some measure of faith. When you begin to cut down your ideals, you are not only maiming your own sense of duty and obligation, but destroying at the same time your sense of the Divine power and willingness to help. Do you think that is well-pleasing to God? Our ideals are pictures that embody a faith, some lines of which have been limned by God's own master-touch. Do you think it is an acceptable thing in His sight to see His own creations in the heart and conscience vanish into air? What would have been the emotions of some of the great masters who painted pictures that perished at the burning of the Tuileries, if they could have been summoned to stand by and watch the choicest thought and ripest skill of their genius perish in the flames of the Commune? Do you think Carlyle would have looked unusually benign if he could have seen Mrs. John Stuart Mill's kitchen-maid light a fire with the newly-finished manuscript of his "French Revolution," a volume into which he had put the closest thought and fiercest intellectual energy of months? Do you think it is a thing likely to enlist God's favour, and bring Him near in help and power, to see you put the torch to those ideals that enshrine the faith He has been working in your hearts for years? Is not faith indeed the most precious of His creations? The peevish and impatient temper that flings away the ideal blasts this Divine thing. If you would wield power over the heart of God, hold on to your ideals. Do not toss them aside in some fit of childish ignorance and disappointment.

This is very good and reassuring, but we all have a great deal of human nature about us and are not quite satisfied. It is not enough for us to be adding the strength of our secret sympathy and prayer to those subtle currents that are coursing through the universe and shall flow on with all time. We want to have some visible place and representation in the work. Had David's ideal any such practical value as would catch a cool business eye?

III. Think of the influence of David's ideal upon *the actual work of erecting the Temple*.

It is perhaps a mistake to speak of any ideal of a devout heart as altogether unfulfilled. None of the aspirations of a loving and a believing heart are aspirations only; they are unborn events, sacred history in the spiritual stage of its making. David's ideal fell short of fulfilment in little but name. Like every sincere, reverent, unselfish ideal, it brought a chain of practical agencies into immediate

existence and operation. He was permitted to form political alliances that were of no small importance in expediting the work, to amass treasure, to gather material, to summon skilled workmen from afar; and although the Temple did not bear the name of the stern man of war, he did as much towards its erection as Solomon. Without his part of the work, the structure must have been delayed for a generation. The capital used in its construction was largely his; Solomon's was the executant hand. The son was but the administrator of the father's will. Let us learn the lesson. We shall at least be permitted to accumulate much of the material, and to create much of the machinery, by which in the fulness of time our ideals will be brought to triumphant accomplishment.

David's ideal became the accomplished work of his successor. Surrender your ideals, and you rob your successors of their vantage ground. Your towering ideals of to-day, if grasped with fidelity and followed up as far as God permits, shall be a secured platform for the action of the next generation. If you want to effect anything in the life of mankind at large, hold fast to your first ideals.

You will not expect me to say very much about the formation of ideals, the great ideals respecting the progress of the kingdom of heaven (those are formed for us in the prophecies), and the minor ideals that contemplate the relation of our individual work to the general interests of the kingdom. You should at least pitch your ideals high enough to make sure they will be called extravagant by all those in whose hearts is the love of the world, and not the love of the Father. I would turn all my ideals out of doors at once and get a fresh consignment, if I did not feel sure that those who are without an experimental knowledge of the power of Jesus Christ would call them fanatical and intemperate. Of course there should be a Christian reasonableness in all our ideals; but ever since the Pentecost the fanaticism has been in pitching them too low, and not too high. If the world calls your ideals sober and well-considered, you may rest assured that there is nothing in them that will carry you, and those for whom you labour, one whit nearer God and enduring blessedness, nothing of the spirit of that prince of idealists who exclaimed, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me," and who compassed more in his sublime poverty than kings and conquerors. In forming your ideals, never mind how daring they are, if the pure love of God and man enters into their deepest essence. But above all things try to keep the pride out of them. It is chiefly this which consigns our best ideals

to a tardy and protracted fulfilment. Do not let pride slip in and corrupt an ideal that is of God.

Having once formed your ideals, hold them fast. Never turn your back upon them. I am ashamed to hear some men talk of their ideals. They sneer at the ideals of their youth as if they were a species of wild oats they had been sowing, and not God-begotten and immortal seed. We pride ourselves upon the change. We are irreproachably sober and practical now. Were we not perhaps far better men in the days when great and glowing ideals were nestling in our hearts? Hell keeps carnival when it can shame us out of our ideals. Do not be satirist where God is admirer, and set your small, cynical sneers at yourself over against His word of approbation. "Thou didst well that it was in thine heart." David did not turn round and sneer at his own miscalculation, when he was not permitted to accomplish all that he had designed. He did not say : "Ah well ! the thing is not to be brought to pass at present. The whole scheme shall be put out of view. It shall sleep for a generation." He worked up to the very last line to which God permitted him to go. Let such be our temper and spirit. Be constant to all that your new-born soul projects in the ardour of its love to God.

XIV.

THE ECLIPSE OF MIRACLE.

"He that believeth on Me, the works that I do shall he do also: and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto My Father. And whatsoever ye shall ask in My name, that will I do."—*John* xiv. 12, 13.

TWO unities run side by side with each other throughout the whole of this beautiful chapter. There is a unity of the thought, so that word rests upon word and clause springs out of clause, and the whole chapter presents itself to us like some marvellous and compact growth of nature, rather than as a composition. And outside and above this logical unity, there is a unity that comes from the Redeemer's spirit of love to His disciples, a unity transcending the unity of well-clenched scientific speech, a unity that marshals the whole course of the thought, orders every step of the movement, and at frequent intervals attracts the thought back into the plane from which it started.

The chapter opens with Christ's solemn avowal that He would one day make the home into which He was so soon to pass, the home also of all those who had loved Him upon earth. The redeeming Representative was one with His disciples. A glory that He could not share with His own would have little power to stir His heart into longing. "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I *will come again, and receive you unto Myself: that where I am, there ye may be also.*" The chapter closes in precisely the same key. That deep and unruffled peace which shone through the Master's life like an untroubled star through the storm-wrack, and which had often awakened the emulation of the disciples, was not to be the solitary attribute of His own person. He could not enjoy it as an exclusive and unshared possession only. "*My peace I give unto you.*" And this same spirit of love that admits the disciple into oneness with the

Master in all the new positions upon which the Master may enter, puts its stamp upon the thoughts in the middle of the chapter. Christ could not contemplate His own resurrection-life in its rigidly personal aspects. He thought of it as comprehending the destinies of the disciples : "*Because I live, ye shall live also.*" And it was not sufficient that the disciples should look forward to the same home of glory and the same triumphant clothing-upon with immortality, and be filled in the midst of their present tribulations with the same sweet and mystic peace ; beside all that not a single power that had been entrusted to Him for the fulfilment of His mission would He hold as His own separate birthright. Whatever power the Father had committed to Him for the accomplishment of His mission to men should be communicated in no less degree to the believing disciples according to their need. "Verily I say unto you, He that believeth on Me, the works that I do shall he do also."

And all this grew up, not out of the up-welling tenderness of the last parting, but had been the principle that had guided His past relations with them. We see Him ever inviting and admitting the disciples into perfect community with Himself. Had He miraculous power? He imparts of that same power to the disciples. Is that power about to receive some sensible augmentation with His lifting up from the earth? "He will show Him greater works than these, that ye may marvel." The disciple also must be partaker of it in its multiplied degree. "Greater works than these shall he do, because I go to the Father." Wondrous love of the Master to the believing disciple ! How unlike the men of earth, who are seldom willing to impart of their choicest things to others ! There can be no new anointing, no enlarged prerogative, no effusion of diviner power for our Representative, in which we are not co-partners. Christ will not rise a single step without taking His people with Him. As Christ's power and privilege grow, the disciple's power and privilege grow also.

We have here three things : a *parallel*, a *contrast*, and the *secret of the contrast*.

I. The text presents us with a *parallel*. Christ teaches that there shall be a relation of likeness or identity between His own personal works and the works carried on by believing disciples after His departure. "He that believeth on Me, the works that I do shall he do also."

The terms in which Christ describes His own supernatural works are remarkable and suggestive. He scarcely ever speaks

of them as miracles. As far as we know from the narratives of the evangelists, that word only twice passed His lips. He nearly always uses the quiet, unostentatious phrase employed in the text, "works." He once indirectly describes them as signs and wonders: "Unless ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe." The words signs and wonders in that case might not unfairly be put in inverted commas. Christ, if not quoting the very words of those He upbraids, is at least quoting their precise thought. Once He speaks of His works as "mighty works," to heighten the contrast of unbelief: "If the mighty works which have been done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes." With these two or three exceptions, in speaking of His own supernatural achievements, He always uses this simple, unpretending term, "works." The mere triumph over physical law seems to be forgotten, and there is a godlike unconsciousness of that which is extraordinary to us. The term is suggestive of calm power. These things were not miracles to Him, they were miracles only to the beholder. The word too is one that links His achievements with the achievements of the future Church. It expressed only that which should be common between the two. The miraculous element, in the popular sense of that word, was not the most conspicuous feature in the works. Christ's thought would seem to have been fixed upon those elements in the works that embodied living relations. The eye of the child is caught by the glare of colour in the picture, and a little Red Riding Hood from an illustrated paper will fascinate it just as much as a Holy Family by Titian. The eye of the artist is rivetted by the form and composition and delicate suggestion and sentiment with which the canvas has been made to speak. The wonderful in Christ's works might very well be the great thing for those who had been drawn from an evil and adulterous generation, and who had scarcely escaped its curious and shifting and dissatisfied temper. But in Christ's own view His works embodied living relations, with all their intense interests; and it was these things which made up the essential properties of His works. The wonderful was one of their accidents only.

The first living relation in Christ's works was with the Father. They were a continuous testimony of the Father to the Son before the world. "*The Father worketh hitherto, and I work.*" "*The Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He seeth the Father do.*" "*The Father that dwelleth in Me, He doeth the works.*" The second living relation embodied in Christ's works was with the

Holy Spirit. It was by the mediation of the Spirit that those works were accomplished. You will remember that it was not till some days after His visible anointing by the Holy Ghost that the beginning of miracles which manifested forth His glory was performed. An insinuation against the agency by which He cast out devils was "blasphemy against the Holy Ghost." And it is from this allusion to His works and the works of His disciples, that the promise of the Holy Spirit is unfolded in the verses immediately following the text. The third living relation in Christ's works was with man. They were directed to the removal of the unbelief which separated the world from the Saviour, and subordinately to the relief of human suffering. "If I do not the works of My Father, believe Me not; but if I do, though ye believe not Me, believe the works, that ye may know and believe that the Father is in Me, and I in Him." And again, in the verse preceding the text: "Believe Me that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me: or else believe Me for the very works' sake."

Now these are the essential elements in Christ's works, and the power of accomplishing such works is given just as much to us as to Jesus Christ. Through all the life of a man who believes in Jesus Christ the Father directly testifies concerning His Son. Whilst the man retains a loyal, believing relation to his great Head, the Holy Ghost is the sovereign guide of all his activity, and his works are as perfectly adapted to the removal of suffering, the destruction of unbelief, and the awakening of faith in those with whom he is associated, as were the most imperial works of the Son of God upon earth. "The works that I do shall he do also." Our works, whether answering to changing definitions of the miraculous or not, are identical if they are instinct with the same pervading energy of God and if they convey a testimony of equivalent effectiveness. Of one thing we may assure ourselves, if miracle is indispensable for the creation of faith in any mind with which we are in contact, and nothing else will do it, the works we work in our dependence upon Christ will take in the miraculous too. If our believing relation to Christ is all that it ought to be, whatever the degree of the miraculous that may enter into our works, there will be just as much Divine power of conviction coming out through them upon the world, as through the works that manifested the glory of the Son of God, eighteen centuries ago. Wondrous dignity of faith! Wondrous love of the Son of God! He promises that if we will only make our faith all that He wants, He will bring our poor, struggling life up to the level of

His own majestic life in its faith-creating influence and efficiency. His wonder-working power, in all its splendour and beneficence, shall be but the fountain from which our life shall draw streams to cast forth upon the world. "The works that I do shall he do also."

Does some one insist that a plain definition of the works here referred to must necessarily take in the miraculous element? In that case, if we assume that the miraculous was purely temporary, and has since disappeared from our midst, we must recognise divisions of time in the different clauses of the text. The first clause, "The works that I do shall he do also," will cover the apostolic age. The second clause, "Greater works than these shall he do," will cover the post-apostolic age, and reach down to the latest moment of that mediatorial reign in which the promise has its root and beginning. I am disposed to think we have a share in both the promises. We have at least the consolation that if the smaller promise is taken from us, the larger and richer promise is left. What matters it that the nether springs are dry, if the upper springs still flow in a growing volume of music and sweetness? Let the brackish fountains of Jericho be for ever sealed, if Hermon still cradles an undiminished Jordan beneath its snows? If we cannot do works upon which the miracle-glory rests, we can do works upon which there rests a glory that in Christ's view outshines and eclipses that of miracle, so that even "that which was made glorious had no glory, by reason of the glory that excelleth."

II. *The text contains a contrast.* There is to be a splendid advance in the character of the believer's achievements, an advance that will make them transcend even the Lord's own personal works amongst men. "Greater works than these shall he do."

Christ had always thought more of the moral elements and relations in His works and those of His disciples, than of the merely miraculous. He chided the seventy who returned vaunting their strange possession of miraculous power, and said, "Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice that your names are written in heaven." The time Christ spent in teaching men was enormous, compared with the time spent in healing disease. A second sufficed to touch a leper with His restoring hand: it sometimes cost Him days to do the yet greater work of touching a polluted soul with heavenly light. A word was enough to heal, but many a careful and well-considered argument and suggestion and appeal was needed to bring home all

the saving truth of which the miracle was the vehicle. When the sick of the palsy was let down into His presence, it was a little and secondary thing to make him whole. That might be done by a look or a word. The one thing that made the greatest demand upon Christ's thought was to get the man to accept the forgiveness of his sin. From the larger expenditure of time and care and skill, may we not learn which was the greater work? Over a penitent soul just beginning to yearn for the help of its Saviour, the angels of heaven bend in joy; but no such interest is called forth by the miraculous healing of the body. In the Acts of the Apostles we find the space occupied by narrating the work of miracle small, and that occupied by the work of conviction increasingly large, in comparison with the relative spaces they fill in the synoptical gospels. The apostles were beginning to enter into Christ's estimate of the relative value of the two types of work. They were beginning to feel the force of Christ's intimation that spiritual power was a much grander thing than mere miraculous power. It was indescribably more sublime to renew by the Spirit working through a believing disciple a hard and unbelieving soul, than to make the leper's flesh come to him as the flesh of a little child.

Let us try to get a little further insight into Christ's estimate of the two different types of work.

The physical conditions that constituted Christ's works miraculous are often realized in connexion with spiritual work upon a much more commanding scale. Did some of Christ's works, such as turning the water into wine and feeding the multitudes, imply mastery over creative processes? Whilst fruitful seasons and food and gladness are given by the loving Father to good and evil alike, I have no doubt, the cry of the scientists notwithstanding, they are given in conspicuous degrees to the piety and prayers of God's people. And not to speak of the supernatural influence of Christianity, how much of the wealth of the world is due to the thrift and righteousness growing up out of its conversions! Take away its presence from the earth, and nations that now overflow with luxury would be represented by groups of scattered savages gnawing roots and uncooked carrion. It is Christianity that is feeding the nations. By its uplifted hands of righteousness and prayer it is multiplying bread for thousands in comparison with whom the crowds Christ fed were but as units. And is not this a greater thing than the miracle on the table-land of Bethsaida or the plain of Gennesaret? Did some of Christ's works, such as the glance at Nathanael under the fig tree, the direction that led Peter

to find the stater in the mouth of the fish, the word that twice gave to Peter the hidden harvest of the sea, imply superhuman insight? Have not Christ's disciples, by an insight equally superhuman, been sometimes led to fling the gospel net over men who have been mysteriously drawn for a time within the circle of their influence? How often have Christian preachers proved that God has been gifting them with preterhuman discernment, and enabling them to lay bare the secrets of a life! If the faith of the Church were all that Christ seeks, such instances would be of more frequent occurrence. And is it not a greater work to read, consciously or unconsciously, the secrets of a heart, than to overcome distance or penetrate fig leaves, or see into the depths of a lake? Did the largest group of Christ's miracles imply command over disease and death? How much has that active sympathy which is the outcome of faith in Christ done to limit the ravages of disease and add to the length of human life? Not a little of the scientific ingenuity that is seeking to ameliorate human suffering is inspired by Christian sympathy alone. Much of it, you may be ready to say, is attributable to the prospect of pay and reputation. But the further question may be asked, Whence comes this willingness to pay and this readiness to accord reputation? They come out of that universal tenderness it has been the glory of Christianity to foster. Christian sympathy is the great paymaster, and the scientific ingenuity that is seeking to ameliorate and remove disease, and add to the length of human life is but the day-labourer in its service. Take away the sympathy that Christianity has breathed into the soul of society, and we should abandon our sick and our dying with the indifference and selfish stoicism of savages. Without that sense of community with universal suffering which is distinctively Christian, no motive power could have come into play strong enough to lift the work of healing from blundering empiricism into accomplished skill. Some time ago a New York scientist wrote a book to show how Christianity had opposed itself to the progress of science and civilization at every step. An equally effective book might be written to show the indebtedness of science for its sustained activity of research and invention to the motives created by the Christian faith. It is from the congregation of pitiful hearts Christ has gathered round Himself, that through a thousand arts and appliances healing virtue is going out to the weary, suffering world.

What untold evils have been directly averted by the works of Christ's believing people! We have here a community of con-

verted people, one amongst hundreds of thousands in our land and in all parts of the world. These conversions have issued from the individual or corporate work of Christ's believing people. If the shadows of the evils that were dogging your steps, and were only warded off by a timely conversion, could be made visible and come trooping into view, what a spectacle it would be! Madness, fearful and frantic as that of the man who dwelt amongst the tombs, for one who had just learned in time to bear pain or to bridle rage by trusting upon God. The ruin inseparable from dissolute habits warded off by an early repentance, and the body made fit to be a temple of the Holy Ghost. Integrity that has almost passed under the cloud saved by an opportune submission to God, and parents brought back from the verge of a grave into which they were about to go with broken hearts. The shroud and the coffin and the sepulchre looming near the opening manhood of not a few whose hoary hairs will now be found in the way of righteousness. The miracle of healing is none the less real because disease was dismissed when it was just tapping us on the shoulder, and before it had got its hand upon our heart-strings. The resurrection is none the less Divine, because the arm of the rider on the pale horse was arrested mid-air, and before it had actually felled the victim to the earth. The evils turned back by the conversion of those present in thousands of Christian congregations are as ghastly and as terrible and manifold as the evils that shrank before Christ's word in the days of His flesh. For Christian faith and love to put healing hands upon human sickness and infirmity, to prevent in incalculable degrees human pain, to add year by year to the length of human life in all quarters of the globe, is it not a greater work than Christ's comparatively circumscribed work of healing the sick and raising the dead when upon earth? Did Christ's miracle of healing the nobleman's son in Capernaum, when He Himself was in Cana, and of restoring the daughter of the Syro-Phœnician woman when the mother only could approach Him in person, imply superiority to the laws and restraints of space? The believer's sanctified yearnings can triumph just as proudly over those laws and restraints. His prayers sometimes carry saving virtue over distances far outstripping those traversed by Christ's healing power of old. Be it asked with reverence, Is not this a greater thing than Christ's miraculous superiority to the laws and restraints of space within the little land of Judæa in the days of His earthly sojourn? But it may be said that in many of Christ's works it was the suddenness that made the wonder. Have not some

of the works wrought by believers been wrought by processes equally instantaneous? The very conditions that constitute Christ's works miraculous are often realized in spiritual work upon a more commanding and impressive scale.

The spiritual works effected by believers in Jesus Christ bring about that conviction which is the great end of miracle by more effective methods. In miracle the work of the Spirit came before the eye. In that inward demonstration inaugurated with the Pentecost the work of the Spirit came home to the very centre of the soul. Miracle left the man more or less the victim of his own prejudice, unbelief, self-will. The demonstration of the Spirit restrained the power of these things over the heart of man, for a time at least, and so set free the will to receive the truth. Spiritual methods could woo the will to pliancy with a more triumphant persuasion than sign or wonder. Miracle was only occasional in its appeal. The demonstration of the Spirit in the heart of man was a power that outlasted the believing prayers and labours to which its first coming was a response. And the after-results we find answering to the comparative adaptation of the instrumentalities. The success of the apostles as evangelists far outshone that of Jesus Christ Himself. When the Spirit had come, they created in one swift hour a mass of conviction vaster than that which He had created by the weary labours of His whole life. The wonders of Nain and Bethesda and Bethany were eclipsed by the flame that turned the upper room into a new holy of holies. The harvests of precious fruit gathered in the scenes of Christ's miracles were like the seven scanty harvests of Egypt in comparison with the ingathering of the short Pentecostal morn. He was the tearful sower; they were the triumphant reapers entering into His labour. Blessed dignity that we enjoy as children of the Pentecost! We wield a power over men's hearts that our Lord Himself could not wield in His humiliation. An instrument is put into our hearts for the creation of conviction in our fellow-men, as much surpassing that with which He wrought, as the scientific machinery which rolls on with a swiftness that can more than supply the wants of the world surpasses the feeble handicrafts of the primeval man. If our faith reach up to the full evangelical altitude, we may do by the instantaneous help of the Spirit what it cost Christ years full of pain and sighs and toils to accomplish.

Our work transcends miracle because *the spirit, which is the special sphere touched by it, is more delicately sensitive than the body*, which is the sphere in which miracle was wrought. The un-

seen part of a man's nature has capabilities of enjoyment or suffering which are indefinitely in advance of the part of his nature represented by the senses ; the work of saving and tranquillizing it must be indefinitely higher in both process and result. In comparison with the agony of a wounded spirit, physical suffering is a mere pin-prick. Where you can find me one man whose reason has snapped under the pressure or bodily pain or privation, I can find you twenty men who have suffered that crowning calamity because of wrongs endured at the hands of others. Bodily pain is limited by our limited senses, and a few notes can express it. It needs a most colossal orchestration of strings to sweep out all the sad minors of an infinite spirit's far-reaching woe. To impart health by miracle to a diseased frame is a work unspeakably inferior to that of ministering salvation to diseased souls, plucking out rooted sins from the memory in which they rankle, and freeing the conscience from the haunting sense of eternal wrath. Soul-suffering is so terrible a thing, that God's Son did not think His own life too high a price to pay to ransom from its grasp. In bearing our witness to Christ's death, we minister this reconciling grace, right man with both God and his brother, and end this intense and maddening mystery of evil in the soul. Is it not the loftier work? The suffering ended by Christ's three years of miraculous healing is as nothing to that which I end when, as the fruit of my faith in the Son of God, I work conviction in the mind of a single prodigal, and bring him to the feet of his Father. In doing the work to which the Spirit of Christ leads me, if that work be done in the power of the Spirit, I am lifting unknown burdens from immortal souls. I bring a soul to its Saviour, and I end the pain that would otherwise gnaw like an undying worm, I still the cry that might rise into an everlasting wail. Do not the works Christ achieves through the Church surpass in their beneficence the works accomplished in the flesh in the days of His humiliation?

The spiritual works it is the believer's high privilege to do outshine Christ's personal miracles, because *spiritual work is the key to the final destruction of all physical evil and disability at the last day*.¹ In spiritual miracle, the sentence is pronounced that shall then be carried out, and evil is virtually dead for the man whose nature has been touched by the works we do through our believing fellowship with Christ. Spiritual work fits men to do without suffering, and the moment God judges they can do without it, it shall go for ever. The physical benefits of Christ's miracles were

¹ Stier.

only temporary. The miracle could not always be going on, and when the uplifted hands were withdrawn the shadows reappeared. Pallor vanished for a while, to be succeeded by the fixed pallor of death. Bandages were removed, but the winding-sheet and the face-cloth had to be brought out at last. The man borne of four had to be borne again after the same humiliating fashion, and let down in more complete helplessness, into some rock-hewn tomb. The paralytic healed at the pool by-and-by looked quite as haggard as when those eight and thirty years of suffering were pressing upon him. Perhaps some would think : "Why heal me if only for a time? The short-lived beneficence of miracle is mockery. Why call me back from the valley of darkness if I am to enter its dismal eclipse again so soon? The miracle was only respite. Lo! disease and death come back to undo the triumph of the vanished wonder-worker." By the power I wield as a believer in Jesus Christ I work irreversible miracles. I dismiss disease and death into a realm from whence they can never return. I limit their province in every soul I save, and shut them up to that narrow standing-ground from which they shall at last be hurled into the lake of fire. Miracle raised up against these disasters a bank of sand that withstood their encroachment for an hour. My work, as a believer in the living and indwelling Lord, creates an adamantine bulwark that shall dash back their dark tide for ever. In our impatient arithmetic, the epochs seem long that must needs run themselves out before the curse disappears under which men bow. After all, the interval of suspense is but like the pause in Christ's miracle when He stopped to teach a lesson, or looked round upon the people, before the healing fiat fulfilled itself. The pause is shorter in comparison with the life to be given, than the instructive parentheses in Christ's miracles in comparison with the life He gave. The longer waiting means a more impressive achievement and a diviner life issuing from it. The inward miracle of regeneration is the mainspring of that climactic miracle which sums up all other acts of healing power, when sickness and sorrow and sighing shall be swept for ever away. This is the true virtue radiated from the ascended Saviour, imparted freely to all His disciples, and perpetually reflected from every quickened Church in fellowship with its Lord. It pulsates unseen in our midst just now, but a few transient breaths must come and go before it can be seen that the flush of immortal health has been restored to the universe. In bringing souls to Jesus Christ I am working substantial, matter-of-fact, physical miracles, or rather my enthroned Lord works them

by me. The glory of Christ's miracles of old is that of the morning star ; the glory of my miracle is that of the everlasting noon.

III. The text points out *the secret of this contrast* between Christ's works and those of His favoured followers.

The secret has a Divine and a human side. Christ's presence at the right hand of the Father is the pledge and sign that sin has been dealt with, man's unfitness to receive these high and holy gifts has been taken away, the burden which crushed human nature into impotence removed, and the Father's hand opened to His reconciled people in more than its ancient wealth of blessing. The mediatorial reign took the incarnation, and all its teaching and sacrificial forces, out of provincial and national limits, and put them, with their thousand mystic energies, at the fountain-head of all administration, where human frailty might draw from them grace and life and wonder-working power for ever. The power of the earthly life was like that of the stream, which can fertilize lands in its own immediate vicinity or below its own level only. The power of the mediatorial reign is like that same stream after it has been absorbed into the skies, whence it distils itself in fruitfulness everywhere, and from which no atom of the earth is hid. What a rebuke these words carry to those who make Christ's personal reign upon earth a greater power than His mediatorial sovereignty in heaven ! If He only have an asking and a believing Church through which to act, He can do mightier work by His mediatorial reign in heaven than by His bodily presence upon earth. The energy that must subdue and quicken men is centred in His very absence from us, according to the flesh, and not in some new advent of glory or superb vision of descending majesty.

This secret of transcendent power has an earthly as well as a heavenly side. "And whatsoever ye shall ask in My name, that will I do." Some of the natural forces of the universe can only be manifested through the special elements and agencies that are adapted to transmit them. Electricity must have a pathway of susceptible matter over which to travel, even if that pathway be one of indefinitely minute particles of ether only. So with the spiritual forces of the universe. If the power of the mediatorial presence have no conducting lines of faith along which to travel, it must sleep for ever, and the world be left to swing on in its old grooves of evil and death. The manifestation of all the energies of that presence can only come through the believing request of the disciples. But though the power of that presence can never come into men's daily lives dissociated from faith, its secret influ-

ences help the earliest exercises of faith. The tenderest love is at the fountain-head of all authority, and that ought to embolden us in our askings. How the Saviour, by His selection of words, prompts the very faith He asks! He gives the broad promise, that he that believes on Himself shall do these greater works, and then, by changing the pronoun, brings the promise so near to the disciples, that they could scarcely fail to appropriate it. "And whatsoever *ye* shall ask in My name, that will I do." Prayer, bound only by the holy instincts of the faith that inspires it, and the rights of the name in which it is presented, is a thing of illimitable power.

Let us never forget *the dignity and beneficence of all spiritual work*. It is a nobler manifestation of power than miracle, and will exalt those who are its instruments in a yet higher degree. Sometimes we aspire to be benefactors to our fellow-men in the sphere of the material life, for the man who promotes the temporal welfare of others wins a more rapid and enthusiastic appreciation than the man who promotes their spiritual well-being. This tendency shows itself sometimes amongst very devout people. They display a morbid craving for the healing power of the early Church. Signs and wonders are placed before spiritual teaching. No true Christian will ever slight an opportunity of relieving the pains and disabilities under which men suffer in the present life; but if the Christian doctrine of immortality be true, it is a higher thing to touch a single soul with purifying light than it would be to heal the diseases in all the hospitals of the United Kingdom. The magnificence of spiritual miracle is absolutely peerless. How lavish we ought to be of our work, if we have indeed received the anointing of the Spirit! Were the power of miracle entrusted to us, we should go about the world with untiring eagerness, healing all manner of sicknesses, and making homes of desolation bright again. The greater gift is within our reach. Every true believer is endued by Christ's word with this matchless potentiality, and yet it slumbers within us.

This promise suggests *the plenary character of the Pentecostal endowment*. Christ makes His own miracles the patterns of our spiritual works. Look at the unhesitating ease and power with which Christ wrought His mighty works. The power He needed was always present to His bidding. There was no element of uncertainty in it, no misgiving lest His voice should be unheard, and His healing effort should miscarry, as did the effort of the disciples at the Mount of Transfiguration. The miraculous power

communicated by the Holy Ghost became as much a nature to our Lord as the act of breathing. Spiritual power ought to dwell in us as a permanent possession, so that we can work its works as freely as Christ wrought miracle. That is the standard Christ puts up for us. Is not the Church woefully oblivious of the power brought to it by these words? The force competent to great regenerative issues, we too often look upon as some far-away mystery in the clouds, that comes down and dwells in a chosen saint now and again. Revivals fraught with spiritual marvel we regard as altogether beyond ordinary calculation and experience. The text would seem to teach us that sanctified individual volition has a place in our work; that a man's mind may be so penetrated and possessed by the power of the Holy Ghost, that it shall give out superhuman manifestation as freely as it gives out intellectual force; and that energy to work marvellous changes in the hearts and lives of his fellow-men shall become as innate as one of his own mental aptitudes. Not only does the river of life gush in its first uprising from the throne of God and the Lamb, but it flows in its after-course through all the channels of a believing humanity. "He that believeth on Me, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water."

These words suggest the obligation resting upon us to maintain unbroken communion of spirit and life with Jesus Christ. Christ's wonder-working power arose within Him, as the expression of His complete union with the Father. "The Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He seeth the Father do." This lofty power pledged to us must come in precisely the same way. Lacking this power, we have not come into abiding union with Christ. "He that believeth on Me, the works that I do shall he do also." Christ is the spring of power there. "And greater works than these shall he do, because I go to the Father." Christ is the spring of power there. The faith that makes Christ ours, in a rich and co-operating community of action and of life, must be vital, intense, unwavering. Three stages of faith are indicated in the context: "believing Christ's works," "believing Christ's words," and "believing on Christ Himself"—direct fellowship with His Spirit without an intervening work or word to help the imperfection of faith. It is to this last stage of faith only that these greater works are promised. May we have that perfect faith which shall make Christ ours, not only as a sacrifice for sin, but in all the wonderful fulness of His resurrection-life and power.

XV.

THE PROBLEM OF THE RESURRECTION.

“He is not a God of the dead, but of the living.”—*Luke xx. 38.*

THE doctrine of the resurrection of the body has excited more protracted and wide-spread discussion than any other doctrine that has made its appeal to the religious hopes and interests of mankind. Some doctrines have been eagerly debated for a few generations or centuries only, and have then retired into comparative obscurity. But this doctrine has been debated with equal keenness both before and since the dawn of the Christian era. Some doctrines have been debated within narrow geographical limits, and have become dividing lines between different sections of the Church. This doctrine has been debated with equal ardour by the Jewish and Christian Churches alike, and the last word upon the subject has not yet been spoken. Sadduceeism on this question still opposes itself to orthodox teaching, and the modern Sadduceeism has a great deal more to say for itself than the sectaries who confronted Christ in the Temple. Here and there we find men claiming to be in the van of religious thought, who plainly tell us that they have given up all belief in a physical resurrection. On the other hand, ingenious German writers are to be found who maintain that some indestructible germ will survive from the dissolution of the body, and that this germ will be the starting-point for the development of the resurrection body. The speculation seems grotesque and materialistic. In ever-changing terms, the old controversy rages still.

If one of the old Sadducees who met Christ in the Temple could reappear in our midst, he would doubtless claim that the whole course of knowledge and research had made it clear that his own party was entirely in the right. He would perhaps refer us to the gruesome descriptions given by travellers of the Towers of

Silence at Bombay, the places where the Parsees deposit their dead. He would remind us how birds of prey swoop down upon the corpses, and the fleshless bones at length drop through the gratings into the place beneath. How, after a process like this, asks the triumphant controversialist, can bones and flesh come together again in a resurrection? He would point us to the burning ghâts through the length and breadth of India, and ask us to watch as the human ashes are cast into sacred rivers and pass with the overflowing of the rivers into the paddy-fields to nurture crops, which shall in turn nurture the flesh and blood and sinew of successive generations of Hindus. What can we say to that? Or he calls our attention to newspaper clippings which he has carefully preserved, telling of the way in which the bones of Turkish soldiers who fell at Plevna, and Italian soldiers who fell at Massowah, have been sent to bone-mills in different parts of England, and made into artificial manures, and sold to English farmers to be manufactured into grass and clover and corn, which in turn pass into dairy produce and butcher's meat and baker's loaves, and appear at last on the tables of the British public. He asserts we are all unconscious cannibals. Men's bodily structures are built up out of the disintegrated organisms of the past. The old difficulty of the seven brothers with one wife is child's play to this. The same particle cannot surely enter into the resurrection bodies of a hundred and one different people who once had a life-interest in it. He reminds us perhaps of Professor's Huxley's amusing comment upon the well-known passage from Shakespeare :

"Imperial Cæsar, dead and turned to clay,
Might stop a hole to keep the cold away :
Oh that the earth, which kept the world in awe,
Should patch a wall t' expel the winter's flaw !"

The Professor's comment runs : "The plants are devoured by animals ; animals devour one another ; man devours both plants and animals : and hence it is very possible that the atoms which formed an integral part of the busy brain of Julius Cæsar may now enter into the composition of Cæsar the negro in Alabama, and of Cæsar the house-dog in an English homestead." If the Sadducee, with an education enlarged by contact with diverse races and civilizations, and liberalized by eighteen centuries of knowledge, could come back and meet his own antagonist, the Prophet of Nazareth, a new steadiness of audacity would look through his eye, and a new sense of triumph would light his brow. "Whose

atom shall it be in the resurrection of the dead?" is a question that goes farther down into the core of the subject than the old legal quibble, "Whose wife shall she be?"

If the supposition is not too absurd, imagine a thousand litigants are claiming the title to the same square-yard of land. These multitudinous claims are to be adjusted in a law court. The mere prospect would drive every judge to distraction. If the resurrection body is to comprehend every particle of matter in it at the moment of death, the doctrine of the resurrection involves more gigantic perplexities than even that. The problem would mock Omniscience, for it involves mutually exclusive conditions. We land ourselves in endless difficulties if we assume that any specific group of atoms is indispensable to the identity of the resurrection body. If science, on the one hand, has emphasised some of the difficulties that invest this question, has it not, on the other hand, opened the way to a truer perception of the elements of the problem, and left Christ's transcendent moral argument for the resurrection absolutely untouched?

It would be worse than idle for us to speculate upon the mode of the resurrection; but a little thought may enable us to see that a resurrection of the body involves no scientific contradiction, and may free our minds from embarrassment when we stand face to face with scientific utterances upon this question. What is the body? Is there an identity of the body as well as of the spirit? In what does the identity consist?

The physical universe, chemistry tells us, is built up of some sixty or seventy primary elements. Under new methods of research, some of the things now classed as elements may prove to be compounds, and the original elements may be greatly reduced in number. Not more than one-fourth of these elements enter into the composition of the human body. Sir Henry Roscoe said, in a recent address, that "if the smallest object we can see were a cube-box, sixty or eighty million atoms of oxygen or hydrogen would go into the box." Now one atom is indistinguishable from another, except by the chemical properties characteristic of the class to which it belongs. No sign of individual identity whatever has been impressed upon the ultimate atom. If that universe could be decomposed in some gigantic laboratory, you would have it resolved into sixty or seventy colossal pyramids of atoms, less distinguishable from each other than the grains of sand upon the shore or the motes floating in the sunbeam. But whence came the shapes of the clouds, and the distinctive features of the landscape,

and the endless patterns and outlines of rivers and forests? If the body could be resolved into its chemical parts, you would have a much smaller number of pyramids, and the atoms composing each pyramid would be less distinguishable from each other than the white particles floating through a flour mill or the grains of pollen in a pine-wood. Whence came the innumerable signs of identity that marked men off from each other and made them distinguishable amongst millions?

You look upon the preparations some gifted worker in mosaic is making for a great subject he is about to execute. His little cubes of stone or composition, alike in shape, but diverse in shade or colour, are grouped into twenty or thirty different classes. The cubes in the same heap are quite undistinguishable from each other. You could not identify one from another if a prize of a hundred pounds were to reward success. At last the artist gets to work. He builds these tiny fragments that are arranged together in twenty or thirty different sets into a noble picture. You can never forget the subject of the picture. The identity that has stamped itself for ever upon your memory comes from the form into which the artist has combined them. They borrow all their present distinctiveness from the design to which they have been made to contribute, and that was once in the artist's mind, and nowhere else. No single cube is necessary to the identity of the picture. You could substitute facsimilies from the common heap out of which they were taken, and the great effect would remain the same. Take a photograph of the mosaic, and then destroy the whole ; and with cubes from the same heaps you could reconstruct substantially the same work of art. Let the cube represent the atom. Identity does not rest upon the individual atom, but upon the design into which the great Artist has worked the atoms. Does not the illustration help us to this principle, that the identity of the body must arise either from some impress the spirit itself puts upon the atoms associated in the structure of the body, or from some specific design in the Creative mind that has guided the building of the atoms into a body, and moulded the characteristic features it bears?

We shall see more clearly what the real problem is, if we bear another fact in mind. The atoms entering into all organic life are in a state of constant flux. They are ever passing away in swarms, and new swarms of atoms are coming in to take their place. A few years hence, and not a single atom from the past will remain. You insist upon the identic atom theory? Then allow me to re-

mind you, no man is precisely the same man for twenty-four hours together, or even for twenty-four minutes. In assuming that he is, you overstretch the evidence of the senses. There are products that form part of my flesh and blood that will soon have become waste products. They are burnt up by the oxygen in every breath.

A curious superstition leads the custodians of one of the temples in Japan to renew the whole of the structure every ten years. The work of renewal is always going on, a little at a time. Every new part is an exact facsimile of the part it is made to replace. And all that has never ceased for a thousand years. Now if you were to look upon a picture of the temple painted a thousand years ago, and then to look upon the actual temple to-day, you would recognise it as substantially the same. Not a single proportion, not a square foot of carving, not a solitary tint or shade has been altered. There is loyalty in every detail to the old design ; and in this way the identity of the first structure is maintained. And the temple of the body is always being renewed after the same fashion. In the resurrection it will be renewed at once, rather than part by part.

Physiologists tell us that in less than five years every particle of matter in the body is changed. If specific particles are necessary to the identity, the man himself has changed with these changes, and ceases to be the same man. Insist upon this silly fiction, that identity consists in specific atoms, and the child who wished to escape parental control might fairly argue that he was his father's child no longer ; the wife who wished to escape a husband of incompatible tastes and disposition might argue she was free without any legal form of divorce, because these physiological changes had dissipated the wife married a few years ago ; and the debtor might argue that nature had established an inviolable statute of limitations, and that he was under no obligation to repay his creditor, because it was an entirely different person, in the chemical sense of the term, who contracted the debt five years ago. The sped atoms have carried away the identity with them in their unknown flight. Chase them, and make good your claim, if you can. Insist upon this idea, that identity roots itself in particular atoms, and men would exchange identities, if they could only exchange the food on which they had subsisted for the past five years. Nothing could be more monstrous than the absurdity into which this crude assumption leads, and yet it is this very assumption that is at the root of our difficulties about the resurrection.

The atoms that are flowing through my physical frame, like a slowly moving river of frozen snow through some Alpine chasm,

are no more necessary to my identity than are the particles of air to the identity of the organ or the characteristics of the tune played upon it. The air may have passed through the ventilators, and have been driven far out to sea ; but music and organ are not gone because the particles of air that passed through the pipes are irrecoverable.

We are constantly using this term identity in our daily life, and its common use may furnish us with helpful and instructive analogies and illustrations. We speak of the identity of handwriting, of places, rivers, tunes. You say the handwriting of half a dozen letters or documents is identical. One may be written with black ink, another with blue, another with red, another with pencil ; but the same habit of hand betrays itself in all. The handwriting is perfectly recognisable as the same in all colours and in all materials. One particle of ink is not more necessary than another. The same habitude of touch, the same nervous idiosyncrasy, the same inevitable movement of the muscles in shaping the letters appears under all conditions. And so the identity of the body does not consist in this atom of dust more than that, but in the clear-cut and universal impress put by man's thought and memory and moral life and whole personality upon the particles that are associated in his physical form and organization.

We speak of the identity of places and rivers. The identity of place does not consist in the particular blades of grass that may be springing from the earth, or the particular leaves that may be clothing the limbs of the trees, or the particular grains of soil that may lie on the surface. The identity of a river remains unchanged, although all the particles of water that were flowing through its banks yesterday may have passed away, and a new alluvial deposit may have been brought down to cover the fields on its banks. The Thames is the same Thames now that it was when Julius Cæsar crossed it nearly two thousand years ago, or centuries later when James II. was flying down its stream away from his ill-filled throne. Yet possibly not a single particle of rain collected in its volume may be the same. The Humber is the same river as it was when the Scandinavian wanderer came to its mouth and gave his name to Grimsby. Had its bed been dry for years, like the bed of some tropical rivers, it would still be the same old river when the drought was over and a new flood of water began to roll between its banks. The old, ineffaceable landmarks are the vouchers of its identity. Ever-changing atoms may be flowing like some sluggish stream through my outward life ; but my personality, on its physical side

even, remains unchanged, though these component atoms are ever passing away. One day the current of atoms shall cease. Notwithstanding that, there shall still be present to God's eye recognisable marks of what I once was in my physical life. When the great revolution comes which shall start a new current of atoms into the old channels of my life, I shall still be the same physical man. The specific atoms comprised in my body at death will be no more necessary to its identity than the particular dinner I ate yesterday.

You are rivetted for hours by the sight of some beautiful rainbow that has formed itself in the spray of a great waterfall. The particles of vapour in which the sunbeams are sifted out into those lovely bands of colour are not the same for two seconds together. New particles are rising up in a perpetual cloud from the thundering gulfs under the cataract to transmute the sunlight into this gorgeous living arch. But the magnificent image is unchanged, despite the perpetual change in the conditions of its production. You may watch for an hour, and it is still the same bow. A storm cloud may sweep across the face of the sun, and the rainbow vanish. But when the cloud has gone, and the rainbow glitters again, you call it the same bow. You watch till the gloaming comes, and the sun sinks behind the hill, and the birds flutter into the bushes and grow dumb in the overspreading shadows. The bow is gone. You come back at the sunrise. As the morning breaks, the bow of yesterday reappears. The water drops have changed, but you recognise the circle of quivering splendour as the same.

All the signs of a man's identity are projected into his physical life from the spiritual centre of his personality. The constituent elements of his physical organization may change, but the identity reflected there is unchanged. The glooms of death may come, and all the physical signs of identity may fade away. But with the dawn of the resurrection the spirit shall image itself upon new atoms in lines that cannot fail to make the old identity unmistakable.

The identity of a tune consists in the succession of certain musical notes in a prearranged order of association. The particular particles of air put into vibration in the execution of a tune are not necessary to its identity. You recognise "Auld Lang Syne" as the same tune, whether it vibrates through the frosty air of the Arctic circle or the sweltering air of the Tropics. The instrument that starts and controls the vibrations is not necessary to the identity of the tune. These vibrations may be produced by harp

or cornet or organ or voice, but the identity of the tune is unchanged. The illustration is not alien to the subject. The tune is expressible in an arithmetical formula, and the quality of the tone may be written down in figures. Instruments have been devised which not only register the number of vibrations in each note, but describe their form.

And so the identity of the body rests upon a given order and combination of atoms, and not upon the specific atoms themselves. Unless the formula of combinations that determines my individuality has perished from the very thought of God, a physical resurrection can never be pronounced impossible. Let God put down this formula of combinations that was at the basis of the old identic man into any group of atoms, and revitalize it with His own word, and the old identic body shall reappear. It may be that the spirit carries with it the formula of its old fleshly shape, and when set free by the word of God may rebuild that shape by unconscious instinct, from whatever concourse of atoms it may find at hand.

Of course we do not attempt to prove the resurrection of the dead in this way. These illustrations are simply meant to clear the path of the particular difficulties felt by some people in receiving the doctrine of a bodily resurrection. The proof of the doctrine is moral and religious, and for that we must go to Christ's words.

Christ argues this doctrine from God's covenant relationship to the forefathers of the Jewish race. If God is an ever-living God, He will make His servants, in their complex life and personality, partakers of His own immortality. The master who had accepted a man as his bondservant would never suffer that bondservant to go hungry and naked and shelterless, while he himself wore purple, and fared sumptuously, and walked amidst the splendour of palaces. The covenant relationship between the two involves some sort of community at least in the essentials of life. A right-hearted king would feel himself dishonoured if he were to go on adding palace to palace, whilst his soldiers were shoeless and unfed and dispirited by hopeless arrears of pay. The true sovereign feels bound to share some portion of his wealth with the men who are the guardians of his kingdom. A merchant Cræsus who had entered into partnership with some man of limited means would be bound to bring his resources to protect the firm of which he was the moneyed partner against disaster and insolvency. When the poor man's capital was spent, his partner would be dishonoured if he were to fail to reinforce their common enterprises with fresh

capital. To refuse to do that would be to disclaim the partnership. And so God would mock His own fidelity by entering into covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and then leaving them to sleep for ever in the caverns of Machpelah.

But some acute critics tell us, that, accepting Christ's premises, His argument is a sound argument for the immortality of the soul, but it scarcely touches the question of the resurrection of the body, which was the one question in debate with the Sadducees. If God gave to those patriarchs the immortality of spirit He possessed Himself, the covenant relationship would be amply honoured, apart from a bodily resurrection. If we go back to the standpoint of the patriarchs, we shall see, I think, that Christ's argument was sounder than the criticism which seeks to invalidate it. Remember what simple-minded men these patriarchs were. They were not metaphysicians. They were not profoundly analytical. Whilst vaguely believing in immortality, they had no philosophies illustrating the separate existence of mind and matter. When God entered into covenant relation with them, it was with them as they knew themselves, and not with some undiscovered, immaterial side of their nature only. The resurrection was implied in all the early assertions of immortality, because these devout, simple-minded patriarchs had scarcely analysed themselves into those distinctions of mind and matter, about which philosophy has been contending so long. Whatever the terms of this covenant relation might signify in ages educated to abstract methods of thought, to the patriarchs themselves they signified resurrection as well as immortality. In no part of the life of God's servants should death triumph.

It dishonours God to suppose that He is the God of a dead people. He would not call into His service dust that should irrecoverably crumble. He is not jealous for the dubious honour of being the God of graves and skeletons and corruption. Death is an uncleanness in God's sight, because in the particular form in which it comes to us it is the work of sin ; and God will yet undo that work, and swallow up death in victory. Under the old dispensation the taint of death could not come into God's house. The priests who waited upon God were not to make any outward mourning for the dead. The person polluted by the touch of a dead body could not engage for the time being in holy things. In that regulation God disclaimed all proprietorship in death and its disasters.

Some boat is ashore. The timbers are fast breaking up. The cargo is washed away. The grim ribwork stands out on the

horizon, the melancholy remnant of a sound and well-appointed vessel. No man would be proud to call himself the master of such a craft. A pile of noble buildings is burnt to the ground. No one would be particularly happy to call himself the lord of those gaping windows and dropping timbers and unsafe foundations. If the owner had not capital to reconstruct his property, he would very soon take steps to get it off his hands.

And so God can never glory in His sovereignty over a nature that is dissolved by death. The declaration of His continued sovereignty implies that the ruin shall yet be reversed. "He is not a God of the dead, but of the living."

Christ's words suggest God's estimate of the dead. "All live to Him." He accounts them living. Their spirits move in His presence. Death has separated them for the time from the fellowship of their kind, but it has not separated them from His fellowship. And this immortality of the spirit carries with it the potentiality of a resurrection. The spirits that still live to Him, He can make to live again to their kindred spirits in the flesh.

The unskilled eye looks upon a heap of brown odourless bulbs. It sees nothing of very great interest there. The skilled eye looks upon the same heap. The bulbs suggest at once the blooms and the odours of the coming summer. To the one who is familiar with the right conditions of culture, it is but a step from these bulbs of common vegetable cell and fibre to the rich crowns of colour and the streams of incense at which the angels might fill their censers. And so with God when He looks upon His sleeping saints. Jairus' daughter and Lazarus live, though all others may call them dead. To God's all-seeing eye the step from death to the resurrection is but the breadth of a hair. "All live to God."

Let us hold fast to the doctrine of the resurrection of the body. If our friends have gone into their graves for ever, and we are fast following them, deathless though our spirits may be, we miss half the blessedness of immortality. The physical universe, of which our bodies are a part, has not been created in vain. It is not some grand error, every trace of which is soon to be wiped away for ever. There shall be new heavens and earth, and through the resurrection of the body we shall come to find our place in that renovated Universe.

Our covenant relation is with a Lord who has Himself risen from the dead.

XVI.

THE TWOFOLD CLASSIFICATION.

“Before Him shall be gathered all nations : and He shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats.”—*Matt.* xxv. 32.

“I CAN understand what is to become of the sheep, and I can understand what is to become of the goats ; but how are the alpacas to be dealt with ?” These words, quoted by a writer in the *Nineteenth Century*, touch one of the difficulties of the last judgment that has probably occurred at some time or other to most of us.

The alpaca, I need scarcely remind you, is a half-domesticated animal that is pastured in large flocks on the upper ranges of the Andes in Chili and Peru. It has long, lustrous hair, and in many respects is not unlike the sheep. An untraveller Eastern shepherd would probably call it a sheep. At the same time it possesses some of the characteristics of the goat. After all however, it is neither sheep nor goat, but a species of small camel.

By the “alpaca,” I suppose the writer meant the man who has admirable and attractive social qualities, but who seems to be almost destitute of religious interest and sympathy and leaning. We do meet with that type of man at times : the man who is upright and generous and wholesome-minded, as far as we can judge, but in whose temperament there are great gaps where reverence and spirituality and supernatural faith should come—the man in whose character you can scarcely find a moral flaw, but who at the same time is conspicuously worldly-minded.

Now the question arises, Is there a nondescript type in character, corresponding to the alpaca in animal life—a type for which the classification set up in the text provides no appropriate place ? Are there men who are without moral determination of any sort—

men who can neither be accounted decisively good nor decisively bad, but for whom some third category must needs be devised in the judgment day?

We are not competent to put upon individual men those marks which will separate them into sheep and goats. A little reflection however will enable us to see that Christ's twofold classification—rigid, narrow, unsympathetic, as some men may pronounce it,—is sufficiently comprehensive to embrace all stages and growths and varieties of human character. Mankind is made up of emphatically good and emphatically bad men, and knows nothing of neuters and hybrids and go-betweens. A close and unshrinking analysis will bring us to that conclusion. For the purposes of the perfect judgment, sheep and goats are the only two types of life to be found in the wide pastures that stretch from pole to pole.

I. Our first thought is, that *a man cannot live out his span of destiny upon earth, be it long or short, without acquiring for himself clear moral determination in one direction or another.*

The science of the last few years has been showing us how all parts of the universe are bound together and kept in place by great laws of attraction. Sirius, an orb three thousand times greater than the sun which sheds light upon us, and the smallest discernible mote that swims in the instreaming noonday, are controlled by the same laws of attraction and repulsion. With the new conceptions that science has given us, it has become simply unthinkable that any orb should be poised in this web of forces called the universe, and possess no centre of gravitation in itself, and be disengaged from all the wonderful forces that are playing around it. You cannot conceive that of what is ultra-microscopic. There is no pin-head vacuum from which the forces of attraction are shut out, and in which a neutral atom could hide itself and find exemption from the laws encircling its kindred atoms.

And in the moral universe is there not something parallel to this? Vast, resistless, all-embracing attractions and repulsions are operating right and left, far and near, and a genuine moral neutrality is impossible. A man cannot breathe for a day the influence of the world into which he comes, without finding his sympathies drawn towards either right or wrong, for the infection of the great conflict takes hold upon every soul. A man's nature is responding throughout every moment of his conscious existence to something that moves him to charity or selfishness, to truth or guile, to honour or shame, to the sweetness of purity or the grossness of passion. The orbit through which a man's moral nature

moves may be more or less extended ; but movement in obedience to fine moral forces there at all times is and must be. The neutral man, who is disengaged from all these manifold attractions, and poised perfectly motionless, without moral bent or impulse or determination in one direction or another, is as inconceivable as the palsied planet or the atom quiescent as a piece of upraised statuary amidst the whirl around it. A clear scientific ethic will show us that this conception of midway types of character, stranded on the dividing-line between good and evil, is as grotesquely false as the conceptions the ancients had of the fixed stars. These stars may be so far from us that we are unable to detect their movements by common methods of observation, but we all know the old idea that their positions were rigid and unchanging is quite untenable. So though, because of our distant and defective standpoint of observation, we may be unable to detect and measure the moral orbit through which a human character passes, nevertheless we know that the orbit is fulfilled, and measured by one Observer without doubt or inaccuracy. The classification of righteous and wicked, sheep and goats, will provide for all the legitimate requirements and idiosyncrasies of human character. Do not bring your dressed up alpaca to the feet of the Shepherd King, and ask Him what He is about to do with it. Your alpaca is as much a fable as the phoenix.

Every child knows that if you subject a common needle to the current of an electric battery, it will become magnetised, and when placed under circumstances in which it is free to turn point due north and south. If wrapped away in a parcel with a thousand other needles, or gripped in a sewing machine, it could not well display the property ; but it would possess this hidden attribute nevertheless. Place it where it can turn itself without friction and hindrance, and its magnetic sensitiveness will show itself at once. Every fragment of steel placed in a strong magnetic current necessarily becomes polarized. Whether the needle will get into circumstances in which it can illustrate this peculiar property to the eye or not, there is no question whatever about the fact.

We shall all allow that a man goes out into the world with an outfit of moral ideas and sensibilities, or at least with some obscure veins or fibres of moral life in his temperament that admit of indefinite development. Most of us, I presume, will allow that all the tracks of human life and experience and social contact are highways of subtle solicitation and allurements, leading on to what is pure and loving and holy, on the one hand, or drawing away to

what is base and ignoble and selfish, on the other. Granting all this, if you put the man with a point of moral susceptibility, however obscure and insignificant, into these currents, his nature must necessarily be polarized in one direction or in the other. He may possibly find himself in circumstances in which the moral bent he has acquired does not show itself for a time ; but that bent is there, a sleeping factor in the man's destiny. There is no crevice or refuge in this wide world of ours in which he can insulate himself from the influences that will determine his direction towards good or towards evil. You cannot purchase neutrality on all moral questions at any price. Christ's classification is rigidly and immutably alternative, and meets all the requirements of man's moral life and history.

You might just as well expect a ship, launched between two whirlpools, to poise itself steady and motionless as a bird mid-air, as expect to find a man pass through life without responding, on the one hand, to those mighty influences that are seeking to awaken him to goodness, or responding, on the other hand, to those scarcely less mighty influences which are seeking to allure him to confirmed and consistent evil. In the family, on the exchange, at the club, in the sphere of municipal or imperial politics, these unrelenting forces are always bearing down upon him, and they compel moral determination in the one direction or the other. A man cannot anchor himself between these portentous currents, and say : "I will ride here in perfect rest, amidst all this mighty swell and agitation. I will keep myself strictly neutral, neither inclining to well-defined saint nor clearly accentuated sinner." All supposed alpacas, upon careful examination, will be found to be either slightly-disguised sheep or slightly-disguised goats.

In the course of some mountain climb you may have noticed that the water issuing from the spring at the top has gathered itself into pool or tarn on the shoulder of the mountain. That seems for a moment to contradict the axiom that water always runs down the hill, and that the slope of the ground where it rises will determine its subsequent course. You know however that it is only an optical illusion. The axiom is still true, and the contradiction is in appearance. The ground where the stream has accumulated itself into a broad body of water is flat, or even hollow. As the stream replenished by the rains continues to flow, the limit of the flat ground is reached, and the stream issues again from the valley side of the pool, to flow in harmony with the dip of the range.

And human life is like a mountain slope. At every point there

are things that are turning our moral sympathies in one direction or another. An inclination towards good or evil is forced upon us by invariable necessity. Where life seems a dead-flat, void of moral interest and significance, and the bent of the nature towards right or wrong appears to be held in suspense for a time, the character is but accumulating for itself new forces of moral determination, which soon begin to reveal themselves through new channels. Far easier would it be for the Alpine avalanche to rest midway on its terrible flight to the valley, for the Nile to gather itself up into stagnant pools between the First and Second Cataracts, for the tides to die down mid-ocean and slumber between ebb and flow, marble motionless as death, than for a man, through peculiarity of temperament, or preternatural power of will, through serene indifference to right, or equally serene indifference to wrong, to put an arrest upon that force of moral determination which throbs in the plane of all lives, and be neither good nor evil. Neutrality of character would be miraculous. There are no alpacas in the flock over which God has set His servant David.

The men who advocate a threefold classification will perhaps admit that, if the question of morality were the only question at stake, Christ's twofold classification might meet all the requirements of justice. But they insist that there is another element to be considered beyond the element of morality,—religiousness; so at least the Churches teach with one consent. If that be so, you must in the last resort separate men into religious men, moral men, and bad men; or, to follow out the simile of the parable, into sheep, alpacas, and goats.

Christ's words form a sufficient basis for the answer to this contention. High, unselfish, deep-rooted, inward morality is one with the most exalted religion. "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My servants, ye have done it unto Me." The working out of that principle will scarcely leave you room for the alpaca, the unspiritual moralist, the irreproachable worldling, the man who is too good for the left hand, and not quite qualified to take a place on the right.

II. *The elements that make and keep a man right in his earthly relationships are essentially one with the elements that make and keep a man right in his heavenly relationships.* The same qualities that will harmonize a man with the demands of his fellow men will harmonize him likewise with the law and character of the great God. Faith, love, reverence, justice, rectitude, enthusiasm for goodness, steadfast longing and striving to bring benediction into the lives we

touch and sway,—these are the things needed to make a man all he should be in his relations with his fellow man, and these are the things needed no less to make a man all he should be in his relations with his God and Father and Saviour and King. It is not one set of virtues that is needed in the sphere of secular and earthly service, and another set the outcome of a generically different root of character, that is needed in the sphere of spiritual and heavenly service. The same qualities and dispositions that make a man just towards his neighbour will make him just towards his God; and all that God asks is the same measure of respect for His rights that we are required to accord to the rights of our neighbours, if we wish to be described as law-abiding, decorous, and honourable citizens. The ship that floats in dock or harbour will float just as well in the open sea. The quality that gives it buoyancy within narrow conditions will give precisely the same buoyancy under conditions that are immeasurably wider. The man who is righteous and loving within the comparatively narrow channels of family and industrial and social life will be righteous and loving towards the great God likewise,—at least, if he is righteous and loving towards his neighbour from genuine, inward sympathy and conviction. The same motive is bound to make him so. Religion and humanity, the service of Christ and the service of Christ's disciple, are both wrought out of the same raw material.

A passage from the writings of a well-known German sceptic will illustrate this. Said the sceptic, in a letter to a friend: "I have become no pietist, but, all the same, I wish to play no more with the good God. I want to behave honourably towards Him as towards my fellow men, and I have torn up with my own hands all that remained of the former blasphematory period, the fairest of my poisonous flowers." Perhaps the principle did not carry him very far, but it carried him far enough to show that he recognised its force and obligation. The same sense of justice that would impel him to make amends for a wrong done to a fellow man was impelling him to some such attitude in his relation with God.

Within recent years science has given us a new word, that will better express what I want to enforce than endless reiterations of my own. I mean the word "solidarity." By "solidarity" the student of science means those mysterious bonds of sensitive union, relationship, and interdependence that connect into one all spheres of being. When he speaks of the solidarity of the race, he means that the different members of the race depend on each other, respond to the same sets of influence, and have been impelled along

their various paths of progress by a common cause. When he speaks of the solidarity of the universe, he means that all its parts are controlled by the same forces, and bound together in their remotest ramifications by the same delicate and unfailing affinities. Now through all the ranges of our moral life and activity there runs a mysterious and unfailing principle of solidarity. Morality is one, whether we view it as a code of indispensable working-day ethics amongst men, or a service of subtle spiritual affection and movement towards God. The things that touch God touch man, and the things that touch man touch God no less. If man was made at first in the image of God, all the activities for which that nature prepared him must have stood in some close and essential relation to fellowship with God. And this affinity is reaffirmed when, in the fulness of time, God is made in the image of man. One of the subordinate purposes of the Incarnation is to show how closely allied the common virtue of humanity is to the service and worship of God. If Christ is at the same time one with the Father and one in no less degree with all mankind, His person is a meeting-point at which morality blends with religion and religion blends with morality. In this parable, the humanity that is sincerely felt and experimentally worked out is the accepted sign of a great love to Jesus Christ Himself. The love upon which Christ smiles does not always perceive the mysterious and far-off relations into which its action pulsates. "He that receiveth you receiveth Me; and he that receiveth Me, receiveth Him that sent Me." There is a mysterious principle of solidarity binding together into one the mighty God on the throne over which the celestial rainbow bends, and the lowliest Christian child that lies wasting in some crumbling garret upon his pallet of straw. The same act touches both. Whilst God's presence inspheres the child, and the Divine consciousness responds to every act done to the child, religion and morality, at some point possibly unperceived by us, melt into each other, and become essentially one.

Can you conceive of a man who is a good man in one direction, and a bad man in another; a sinner when he turns his face to the north, and a saint when he turns his face to the south; an angel with one set of people, and a devil with another? I use the terms "good" and "bad" in the full sense of their meaning. A man may *play* one part in one circle of associations, and another part in another, but his true character is very different from the *rôle* he assumes. The man who is a rogue in the provinces will be a rogue if you put him down in the metropolis. The same principles

that keep a man true to honour in his own land will keep him true to honour in any land under the sun. The mark of a genuine morality is this, that it is infinite in its applications. A man who is right-principled towards men in his own grade of life will be right-principled towards men in all the grades of life that are above him, unless his ethics are a hypocrisy. A true man's sentiments of virtue do not stop, like some families of plants, five or ten thousand feet above the level of the sea. You perceive where the illustration will lead us. The man who is genuinely and profoundly moral in his relationships with his brother-man will be no less genuinely and profoundly moral in his relationships with his Maker. The sympathy with humanity which makes a man feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the imprisoned and afflicted, will make him capable of a fervent and whole-souled love and discipleship to that Divine Friend of humanity who is always doing these things Himself and approving their doing by others.

But some one may argue "that the distinction between the secular moralist and the devout believer is intellectual. The one is indifferent to religion, because he fails to perceive the relations out of which its sanctions arise. The other is zealous in its pursuit, because he perceives those relations more vividly." A little reflection however will show us that defective insight can never explain irreligion. Irreligion must, as a rule, be explained by the impoverishment of the moral life. Let us suppose that a man has perfect sight in his right eye and defective sight in his left. He declares that he is moved with good-will towards everybody whose image is focussed upon the right eye, and moved with ill-will towards everybody whose image is focussed upon the dim left eye ; he is moved to befriend every man he sees with the one organ, and to cheat, misuse, and oppress every man he sees with the other less perfect organ. Would you not call that man mad? However much the man's eyes may vary, his heart is one ; and that is the starting-point of all moral impulse. You would know a man to be either an escaped lunatic or given to banter, who would tell you that his right hand was always working kindness, charity, good-will, and his left hand was equally industrious in over-reaching, oppression, and violence. Morality does not start in the two separate limbs, but in the one soul. Those who maintain that a man may be genuinely moral without being religious, and so scarcely qualified for the rewards or punishments administered by the Shepherd-King, are proceeding upon the basis of just as gross an absurdity. A man who is rightly disposed towards his fellows, on

the one hand, whom he sees with his clear senses, will be no less rightly disposed towards his God, on the other hand, whom he sees through dim spiritual instincts. The same nature will act with some degree of moral uniformity in the two separate directions. The true-hearted friend of humanity is the friend no less of the Son of man and of the Father who has sanctified and sent Him. The raw material out of which morality and religion come is the same.

Let me enforce this by a simple parable. A council of spiders was once called to discuss an emigration problem. One section of the council was composed of the descendants of a caste that had passed the bygone generations of its existence in barns. A proposition had been introduced to the effect that the group should move into a palace that had been recently built in the neighbourhood, and billet themselves in its unoccupied chambers. "Nay," said a gruesome old spider; "these lengths of silk we wind from our spinnerets and attach to the rafters of the barn will scarcely avail for web-making amidst the cornices of the palace, and the gilt picture frames that cover its walls, and the silver rings that loop up its embroidered curtains. We are barn-spiders, and must leave the palaces to the textile industries of others." Another group had passed its days in the low hedge-rows and amongst thistles and briars; but a great agitation had set in, and it was proposed to move out into the cedar forests. "Nay," said a timid spider; "the raw material with which nature has so lavishly provided us may be all very well to fling from thorn to thorn and from bramble to bramble, but we cannot twine this common stuff in and out amidst the branches of the noble cedars." "Fie on ye! miserable mob of legs and claws that ye are, without guiding wit or brain! Do you not see that the same stuff you weave about the worm-eaten rafters of the barn will avail you just as well amidst the cornices and picture frames and silver rods and rings of the palace? Will your gossamer threads round themselves into obedient circles, and sustain the strain you put upon them as you swing from bramble to bramble, and not bend just as pliantly, and sustain your weight just as faithfully, as you pass from branch to branch of the mighty cedars that soar into the blue?" Faith, love, righteousness, reverence, sympathy: these are the things that we weave round the human hearts and lives that are about our daily pathway: and we are accounted moral and virtuous and praiseworthy. Faith, love, righteousness, reverence, sympathy: will not these self-same threads suffice to weave about the throne

of God? God asks no essentially different service from us than that we render to our kind. The qualities that avail us in the lower and earthly sphere will avail us no less in the higher and heavenly sphere. The under and the upper sides of duty are shot through with the same threads. "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me." There is no radical difference between deep and sincere morality and deep and sincere religion. The world's morality sometimes may happen to be very shallow and insincere. We do not need a threefold category. You might just as well expect Professor Owen or Professor Huxley to try and fix the particular order to which the griffin or the unicorn belongs, as ask what the Son of man will do with the alpaca in the judgment day. The category of sheep and goats, of right-hand and left-hand communities, will satisfy all the requirements of an equitable judgment.

III. We are reminded that *these moral and religious distinctions exist amongst those whose education in spiritual things has been superficial and defective.*

The characteristics that fix a man's place in the judgment are sometimes veiled under conditions of imperfect knowledge. We are apt to make the range of religious knowledge the test of a man's religious character. We must beware of that. We must never undervalue religious knowledge. It is a priceless endowment. At the same time we must not overlook the fact that the man who has the minimum of religious knowledge may sometimes be a latent Christian. That is one of the lessons of the parable. And the other side of the lesson is equally true, a side enforced in the closing sentences of the Sermon on the Mount,—the man who has the maximum of religious knowledge may be a Christian in nobody's judgment but his own.

This group of parables, delivered by Christ at sunset on the Tuesday of Passion Week, is a group illustrating different phases of the last judgment. This particular parable seems to illustrate the sentence passed upon men of imperfect religious knowledge and training. There will be a faithful and a faithless amongst the imperfectly enlightened, an elect and a reprobate amongst the heathen, as well as amongst the virgins who are in relations of the closest intimacy and friendship with the Bridegroom. Some commentators make the disavowal of the righteous, "When saw we Thee an hungred?" an expression of humility. That interpretation is inadmissible, because the wicked use precisely the same language. Is the language an expression of humility on their lips,

pray? Both must be testifying to a fact, the fact of their imperfect insight into the relation between humanity and religion, and their clouded perception of Christ's perpetual presence upon earth. Had humility been dictating these words, the righteous would have disavowed the worth of the act, rather than its special relation to Christ. The king accepts the terms of the response from each class, and so acknowledges that in both cases there was imperfect discernment. The righteous had not seen that, through Christ's perpetual presence upon earth, humanity had come to comprehend religion. The wicked or the untruly righteous had not seen that religion comprehended humanity. They wanted great occasions to excite their charities. They did not work out their good deeds right and left with a lavish, indiscriminating love because Christ's own spirit of spontaneous and irrepressible charity was in them. And here we reach a most solemn and instructive lesson. The King, by a single syllable from His judgment throne, can fill up a defect in knowledge. He cannot supplement a defect in essential character. Fulness of knowledge will not save a man. Lack of knowledge will not damn a man, unless that lack arise from the langour of his own moral sentiment and the deadness of his own moral sympathy and conviction.

And here do we not get a glimpse of the principle upon which the so-called alpacas will be dealt with, a principle which in the end shows them to be no alpacas at all? As we said at the outset, some men may be described by this term because, though they are almost immaculate in the practical relations of life, their sense of spiritual relationships is dim and shadowy. Religious claims and interests seem problematical, and have no grip upon their matter-of-fact temperaments. Now this melancholy dimness of religious knowledge may arise from two entirely different classes of causes. It may arise from peculiarity of temperament or disability of education, or limited opportunity. Some people are painfully mathematical. Their natural disposition inclines them to a faith such as Euclid or Archimedes might have originated. At the most plastic stages of their life, they have not been placed amongst influences congenial to religious belief. They are virtuous semi-pagans, scattered up and down through Christian society; but they are brimful of intense moral sympathy, humane sentiment, high principles of life and conduct, affinity for all that is lovely and pure. Can we doubt, if all this be true, that these supposed alpacas are genuine sheep, slightly disguised it may be, and that the King will rank them with the sheep at last? They possess all the moral

essentials of acceptance, and the Judge can fill up by a syllable their accidental defects of knowledge.

On the other hand, there are men who seem to be equally moral, but that is because they find it expedient to be so. They are loyal to their principles, but their principles are little better than skin-deep conventions and proprieties. Their Mount Sinai is a club or a drawing-room. They are full of effusive kindness, at least to people of their own set. They spread the feast, but the lame and the halt and the blind are not on the invitation-list. They would pay every honour and service to a New Testament, wonder-working Christ if He were to come back again, or they think they would. But Christ's actual little ones are uninteresting, and indeed out of their hemisphere altogether. Like the other class grouped as alpacas, these people have no clear and vivid religious convictions. But is it not easy to see that the lack of distinctive religious insight and conviction here originates in indifference, lassitude, languor of moral life and sympathy? At the root of this spiritual limitation there lies a terrible ethical defect. Can any one question that people of this sort are miscalled alpacas, and that when the secrets of the heart are judged, all such must rank with the goats? There is no neutrality here. These people are not interested in religion, because they are not profoundly interested in morality.

We cannot judge individuals. If men assorted themselves by a perfectly obvious law of rough-and-ready application, the Shepherd-King need not come to judge them. Poor simpletons that we are in the discernment of character and of the application of the principles upon which the final classification must rest, we may be very much puzzled at times by these masked alpacas that are paraded before us ; yet the Shepherd-King will find no difficulty at all in determining the true moral status of the man whose character seems the most perplexing compound of opposites. Many of our difficulties upon the subject of the judgment and retribution arise from our attempts to judge the individual. "Judge nothing before the time," said the apostle ; and we stand in peculiar need of that counsel now.

Do not trust to a sentimental or imaginative religion. Never distress yourself because your religion is not more supernaturally realistic. By all means strive after the clearest and brightest visions of God possible to you. Seek to be spiritual. But try, even before that, to be just and tender and brotherly to all men. These things are on the threshold of a true spirituality. "Blessed are the pure in heart : for they shall see God." "Blessed are the merciful:

for they shall obtain mercy." Remember this is true religion, accepted as such by Christ, both now and in the judgment day.

But some one may say: "This is altogether legal preaching. You are putting morality in place of the gospel." Morality, rightly understood in both its root and branch, is the gospel. Mark, I am not saying that any moral act, or any aggregate of moral acts, will save a man. But a moral act that is the outcome of a deep and true moral life will be no uncertain sign of his salvation. Where must we get this deep moral life however? Christ in this parable, which stops little short of teaching salvation by works, still recognises the truth that saving works originate in the grace, goodwill, and blessing of the Father. "Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." Here was the starting-point of all. There had been no virtue of humanity to lighten upon the lot of poor and friendless and imprisoned, but for this touch of benign power from on high. So our salvation is not of works in its earliest inception, although works are the only sure and infallible signs of its achievement, the signs to which Christ the Searcher of hearts shall Himself look in the judgment day.

Let me urge you to the keenest and most faithful self-scrutiny, especially you who flatter yourselves that you are high-principled without being religious. Do not rush to the pleasing conclusion that if not a saint you are no very serious sinner. On the exchange and at the dock-side and in the clubs and associations, where religious profession is at a discount, there is as much pharisaism and hypocritical veneer as in the most unctuous Church circles. Your morality is a superficial pretence, if it does not lead you to deal honourably by all, even by the good God. Criminal statistics show that the cleverest thieves are not infrequently teetotalers and lead irreproachable family lives. You will not, in that case, accept the part for the whole. Their artful morality is not morality in any true sense of the term, because it has a stopping-point. The test of a vital morality is its uniform operation in all the relationships of life and through every dimension of space. All morality is boundless. It dies when you arrest its applications. If your morality has the mark of life and reality about it, it will impel you into just and righteous relations with God. You do not want to invent a fourth category for the man who seems to have religion, but has very defective views of morality. You have no wish to ticket him as a respectable nondescript. If he prays vehemently in a prayer-meeting, and you have found him slippery in business

transactions ; if he is a conspicuous religious worker, and his financial credit is specious, as you have found to your cost ; if he bears office in the Church, and has deceived the poor and the defenceless ; if he has made a parade of his pieties, and has been secretly impure,—you are quite content that a man of that sort should find his way to the left hand. You do not want to make a special category for him, and call him an alpaca, because he has seemed to be pious, and has swallowed the creed and the catechism. You say, if his piety does not keep him in right and just relations with his neighbours, it is rank hypocrisy. And so it is. But be fair in your application of the principle. Your morality is rank hypocrisy if it leads you to be right with man, whilst you forget the just claims of God. Never call a man just and good who does right to everybody but his Maker.

XVII.

CONTRASTED DESTINIES.

"If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead."—*Luke* xv. 31.

THIS parable or allegory is a companion picture to that of the unjust steward at the commencement of the chapter. That parable is designed to show how the use of property for the benefit of others may heighten a man's triumph in the everlasting habitations. This parable is designed to show how the selfish use of property is a sin that may not only exclude a soul from Paradise, but leave that soul in Hades without a possible alleviation or abatement of its pain. The rich man of this terrible picture was a covetous, self-confident Pharisee, who refused to hold his property as a trust from God for others, and who paid for his lifelong luxury with his soul.

I. Our Lord seeks to paint in this parable a series of *solemn, dramatic contrasts*¹ that shall startle, if it may be, these Pharisees out of their complacent selfishness.

1. He first sketches the *contrast between Dives and Lazarus in life*, a contrast the more impressive because the painter does not bring his two figures together from the opposite ends of the earth, or even from east and west of the same city only. Lazarus gasping in the shadow of the gateway, and the purple drapery of Dives moving behind the blossom and leafage of the courtyard in the hall beyond, might have been seen by the passer-by from the same point of view ; so it is no outburst of eccentric idealism that leads the painter to put two such figures on one canvas. Providence has brought together these two persons, representing the very opposite poles of society, for its own disciplinary ends. But the rich man

¹ Godet.

remains in his selfish insulation, and no act of a gracious heart comes in to subdue the fierce lines of this contrast. Fine linen of Egypt, the softness of which makes every movement a luxury, enfolds his sleek, unwrinkled limbs, and robes of shining Tyrian purple make him little less than an art-spectacle to the wondering gaze of his friends and retainers. Lazarus across the courtyard has not the wherewithal to swathe his sores. His scanty tatters scarcely avail to hide from the disgust of passers-by the sloughing wounds on his withered limbs. Each day brought to the rich man's house troops of merry friends, for whom sumptuous meals and wines of rarest vintage were provided. The scant experience of the joys of friendship that fell to the lot of Lazarus was a ride to his begging-place on the back of some rough, kind, working neighbour in the early morning,—alas! it was no great task to carry the poor, emaciated man,—and a ride back to his rude, cheerless lodging at night. The experience the poor wretch had of dinners might be summed up in a glimpse of the household servants hurrying to and fro with the costly viands, and the distracting clatter of plates and winecups borne to his ear by the evening breeze as it began to heave the roses and orange blossoms of the rich man's court-yard; for Christ seems to intimate by this "*desiring* to be fed with the crumbs" that the desire was very much larger than its satisfaction. He did get a crumb now and again, or his neighbours would have taken him to a new beat; but the crumbs were remarkably fine, even for the appetite of a wasted invalid. And there the poor man lay with his patient hunger day by day unvisited, uncared for, un comforted, dreamily watching the shadows shorten on the western and lengthen on the eastern wall as the sun wore on in its appointed course, whilst the rich man had more than heart could wish. "Wait a moment longer, Lazarus! It will be thy turn to banquet soon, and the rich man will be begging at thy gate, and begging in vain." It is a little uncertain what precise interpretation must be given to the dogs of the picture. Is it in humble affection and sympathy that they lick the sores of the beggar? and does Christ introduce this animal sympathy as a foil to the selfishness of the rich man? The dog has not the same honourable place in Oriental as in European life, and such a meaning would be unique in Bible usage. Are these dogs the half-wild pariah dogs of the East? and is it assumed that Lazarus is too weak or crippled to drive them away? Does the silence about the beggar's burial indicate that the neglect he suffered in life followed him till his last breath had been drawn, and that his

funeral obsequies were akin to those of Jezebel? Lazarus has at best a mean and nameless burial, about which silence is best, and the rich man a burial in harmony with his sumptuous past.

2. Christ now paints another contrast, a contrast dealing not with the things that are seen and temporal, but with the things that are unseen and eternal. *The contrast is resumed beyond the grave*, but the figures are transposed. The next world has its contrasts as well as this. Lazarus is borne to a banquet furnished with nobler dainties than earth could yield, and in a fashion very different from that in which his kind-hearted neighbours once carried him to the rich man's gate. Folded in gentle angel arms, and canopied with their outspread wings of light, his spirit passes like a flash from earth straight home to the Paradise of God. He is not shuffled down at the gate for this banquet, but led up to the very bosom of the great patriarch Abraham, and welcomed there as though he were the dearest scion of the race. The rich man by a longer or a shorter interval, follows Lazarus into Hades. They were figures in the same canvas in time, and must be painted in their mutual relations in eternity. The slow waking from the sleep his friends had watched till they knew he could wake no more on earth, comes in Hades. He lifts up his eyes being in anguish, anguish greater than that Lazarus had suffered through hunger and thirst at his gate in life; for the life of the hereafter, for better or for worse, is enormously intensified, a life all the movements of which have in them vast cumulative force. Through amaranthine bowers and the trees bearing all manner of precious fruits in the Paradise of God, he sees the figure of the glorious Abraham afar off, and, strange to say! the old despised beggar in his bosom; just as Lazarus had once watched his purple draperies across the court-yard of the faded earthly home. But more rigid barriers and sterner guardians and gate-keepers separate the two from each other now, than those which separated them in the days of old. Lazarus once silently desired the crumbs, and hungry and thirsty waited in dumb, humble patience through the heats of noon. The rich man in his keener anguish cries, so that his voice is heard afar off, for a drop of water to cool his tongue. Lazarus is abundantly satisfied with the goodness of God's house, and is made to drink of the river of His pleasures. But not a single alleviation from his own lot shall he be permitted to transfer to the rich man now. The neglect of suffering the rich man showed in life, shall be the type of the neglect his own suffering shall encounter when life is gone. Lazarus, poor in life but rich towards God, and now

every want satisfied ! The rich man, increased in goods and having need of nothing, but now beginning to discover an everlasting loss ! A drop of water is beyond his reach. The unalterable contrasts of the hereafter are determined by the contrasts established here.

3. *A contrast of character* underlies this picture. Its outline was not suggested by class hatreds and fanaticisms. The rich man was not damned because his shekels were many, nor was Lazarus saved only because he was poor. Had Christ been addressing other hearers, he might have painted a rich man and a Lazarus in which the abundance of the one should have been ungrudgingly used to soften the hardships in the lot of the other here, and the joy of the one should have blended into the joy of the other hereafter ; a rich man and a Lazarus in fellowship of love upon earth, and in fellowship of glory beyond the earth ; Lazarus welcoming his benefactor into everlasting habitations. The contrast was not necessitated.

If we look carefully into the picture, we shall find subtle hints of character in the background that explain the temporary contrast and its everlasting inversion. When we are told that these Pharisees who scoffed at Christ's teaching were lovers of silver, it is implied that the rich man of the subsequent parable must be looked upon as a Pharisee, and that his absorbing delight in costly apparel and sumptuous fare had a close relation to his creed.¹ Some have found a fatal objection to this interpretation, on the ground that the Pharisees were inclined to asceticism, and that asceticism was scarcely consistent with the luxury and the self-indulgence of the man before us. This however overlooks the true genius of Pharisaism, which, in spite of occasional asceticisms, naturally tended to unrestrained delight and triumph in mere worldly good. The Pharisee regarded his wealth and temporal well-being as at once the seal and the recompense of his own distinguished merit. God was the great Paymaster of man's righteous service rather than the well-spring of free and unearned and endless benedictions. Christ's doctrine of property a trust from the hand of a gracious Heaven, could not possibly fit into the creed of a man who regarded property and all its privileges as the absolute recompense of his own works of legal righteousness or the righteousness of his forefathers. Paul's doxology of grace, "Of Him, and through Him, and to Him," became in the mouth of a Pharisee, "Of me, and through me, and to me." Where there was

¹ Stier.

no sense of freely receiving from God, there could be little or no sense of obligation due to God. Where there was no consciousness of the Divine goodness in giving men all things richly to enjoy, there could be no consciousness of a solemn call for the exercise of goodness to others. Pharisaism, ascribing as it did all wealth to a condition of human merit, inevitably tended to absolute selfishness. The rich man possibly interchanged his daily luxury with a bi-weekly fast, and made long prayers, and practised almsgiving too, when the trumpeter was abroad ; but he had no sense of God's love revealing itself through his temporal well-being, and felt no Divine constraint binding him to love others. As a natural consequence of this estimate of himself and his obligations, he took very little notice of Lazarus at his gate. He perhaps rather liked his presence there. It seemed to speak of the charity of the establishment. He may have thought the poor wretch would be sufficiently looked after by the servants. The constraint of a true love would have led him to look into that question for himself. A heart keenly sensitive to distress would not have been content with a supposition, yea, more, would have sought out Lazarus, and spared his humble friends their daily task of love, and Lazarus himself the wrenchings and rackings and friction of his daily ride. But the self-contented, easy-going man fed on day by day, and made merry with his friends, possibly thinking what a fine fellow God Almighty must esteem him to pour such abundance into his lap, manifestly far better than Lazarus, whom God had smitten with disease and want !

Little is told us of the beggar beyond the contrast in character implied in the name chosen to describe him : Lazarus, or " God my helper." The rich man's life was turned away from God, and turned towards himself ; the beggar's was turned away from himself, and turned towards God. Possibly he accounted himself as born under a temporary dispensation of wrath ; but those glorious promises of deliverance blended with the threatenings of the prophets, as well as the ever-clinging supplications of suffering Psalmists, had taught him to hope in God. The sore chastisements of his life may have forced him into depths of humiliation and self-reproach ; but in the gloomiest abysses to which he sank he could give some pathetic sign of the faith from which he got his name, " God my helper." The conditions of his life made self-righteousness all but an impossibility. He had nothing to tithe but his rags ; and although he had probably done more than a prime Pharisee's share of fastings, the fastings were involuntary,

and he was not disposed to make a virtue of his necessity. But if he had no works, he could cast himself on the free and boundless love of his Maker. "God my Helper." This name would seem to have been the key-note of his poor, meagre life. He could do nothing. He could only lie and sigh, "God my Helper." As he lay through the weary noontide heats, languid with hunger and parched with thirst, when the crumbs were so slow in coming, almost forgotten of his kind, he could check the rising cry of peevishness and impatience by turning his gaze from the unpitying earth to the pitying heaven. "God my Helper." He had breathed his watchword many a time at the rich man's gate, and save a lull of rest in his own spirit, he seemed to get very little in response to his trust. To all outward appearance that help seemed to be as slow as the compassion of Dives. The answer to his lifelong prayer was a long time coming, but it came at last with a rush, came on wings at once swift and bright ; for one day, when he had fainted with weakness and pain, he found his spirit lifted by the angels away from the weary, rotting, bloodless clay, and swept up to greet the spirit of his princely ancestor on high, and he knew Abraham's Divine Friend to be at last his own Friend and Helper indeed.

II. The parable or allegory passes from *the dramatic into the didactic stage*.

1. It teaches that in vain are the destinies of a lost soul appealed to the court of natural affection. Those destinies cannot be reversed or modified by mere relationship to Abraham. The contrast of the opening sentences of the parable is still continued, though the contrast is almost forgotten in the momentous revelations of the unseen that are opened up to view. As the discourse proceeds, the Pharisee in Dives develops itself in more emphatic lines. Lazarus had turned in life from his own misery to God. The rich man, with the true instinct of a Pharisee, turns for help in Hades to his great ancestor Abraham. The Pharisee seemed to see Abraham standing in the background of his own meritorious pieties, and if such a thing could be imagined as the insufficiency of those works for final salvation, Abraham's all-availing help would be at hand for his descendant. It was popularly said, that Abraham would stand by the pit and never suffer one of his own progeny to descend into it. The rich man missed the helping hand of his forefather when the foundation of his own good works was found to have failed. But he still clings to some shred of the flattering tradition, and now makes his appeal to the mediation

of his ancestor for a much more modest boon than that. Surely there will be pity there! "Father Abraham!" Surely that cry will bring help! Abraham admits the tie of blood-relationship and affection. "Son." But blood-relationship and affection are not to be the controlling factors in his destiny. The great heart of tenderness and generosity must admit the justice of the condemnation into which the rich man has come. "Thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and Lazarus evil things. But now he is comforted, and thou art tormented." Thou hadst the fruit of thy choice then, and he has the fruit of his choice now. Thou canst not have a double choice—a choice then and a separate choice now, a choice of cause and a choice of an entirely different kind of consequence. The contrast now is the necessary counterpart of the contrast then. Abraham, ancestor though he be, is in perfect touch with the everlasting justice. He has such views of the unalterable righteousness, that he would not stir a finger in answer to the prayer of this lost one, even if the gulf could be passed. The sonship is freely and gently conceded, but wider questions were then within the range of the great patriarch's view. Natural affection has not failed or passed away, but all moral principles and sympathies have so deepened, the spiritual horizon has so grown and uplifted itself about his soul, that mere natural affection has become a court of vain and empty appeal. His relationship to the rich man is subordinated to his relationship to the great just Judge of the seen and unseen worlds, the ancestor in Abraham is swallowed up in the servant of the great white throne.

This vain confidence of the Pharisee is abroad in our own day. The creed of Universalism, which makes God a mere synthesis of our flesh and blood affections, and affirms that His infinite Fatherhood will never suffer a single human soul to finally perish, is but a modernised Pharisaism set free from tribal limitations. It makes God a cosmopolitan Abraham. It ascribes salvation to organic relationships, and leaves all the moral conditions and principles of the problem out of the reckoning. Mr. George Macdonald makes the finest character his imagination has painted represent this spirit. Robert Falconer shocks his orthodox Calvinistic grandmother by telling her he would never sit down to feast in the presence of the King in heaven whilst his father was suffering in the pit the penalties of his life-long besotment. He would present himself before the throne of God, and demand the right to go down from heaven and preach salvation to the lost spirit in the flame.

The saving mediator in that case is the descendant rather than the ancestor, but with that little exception the most devout of the modern novelists has simply reproduced the Pharisee's conception of Abraham's compassionate function to those who were of his own flesh and blood. A little reflection ought surely to show how, with all advancement in human society, natural affection counts for less and less, and broad moral principle that is scrupulous about the right and interest of all counts for more and more. In the time of Confucius, some man was accused of robbing a poultry yard. The thief's own son became a witness against him. Confucius spoke in tones of severest contempt of the son who was so wanting in "filial piety." Does not that show how the moral sentiment of mankind has advanced? Public opinion in modern Europe would insist upon the right, and let the relationship take care of itself. Not many generations back, the sense of clanship in countries now ranking as civilized predominated over the sense of public duty, and no offender, however foul his misdemeanours, would have been surrendered to the law by men of the same name and clan. Moral principle in its manifold applications is rising even now high above all blood-relationships. That fact in the development of morals ought to teach us that in the stages of advancement that are yet before us in our immortal progress, the sense of kinship must be subordinated to the sense of right. Vain is it to invoke flesh and blood affections, or even that wondrous archetype of them we call the Divine Fatherhood, against the sentence of eternal rectitude. You say, "All human fatherhood and all human motherhood protest against it." Unenlightened natural affection would protest just as completely against terminable as against interminable punishment, and the argument from its protest is just as empty in the one case as in the other. Perhaps no portions of the New Testament parables of punishment are more suggestive than those which introduce the inevitable sentence by a designation of gentleness or affection. "Friend, I do thee no wrong." "Son, remember." There is still love, but it cannot save. Lips of love seal the doom and ask the very Amen of the victim himself.

2. The parable asserts that the contrasts of the hereafter are maintained by *the inexorable necessities of the Divine government*. "Beside all this, there is a great gulf fixed." Apart from the acquiescence of the patriarch in the destinies of the after-life, there are outward obstacles that make the rich man's prayer impossible of answer. The chasm that formed itself in life has been made impassable by a Divine decree. The next world will be fashioned

after some sort of harmony with the pattern of this. If God had made our planet one great unbroken plain, without seas and gulfs and mountain-chains, the different tribes of men would simply have eaten each other up like so many nests of cannibal ants. He has divided out the world with granite hills, and channelled it with seas and streams. It was behind these barriers that the different tribes of primitive man could grow and gather knowledge and develop civilization. But for these natural obstacles that separate men who cannot sympathise with each other's life, the planet would have been a perpetual Armageddon. There must be the barriers to isolate men of incurable antipathies. We have to create them by art where they do not already exist. And the next world will need its bridgeless chasms and impassable mountains just as sorely as this; for the separation of spirit and habit and life between the good and the bad is accentuated with their progress through time. If good and bad were merged together in the world to come, in some new chaos of struggle, God would stultify all the uses of this world. The good could not grow in strength and blessedness under the sunlight of God, and work out their immortal future, apart from these separations.

The other day our Australian colonists were urging us on to what might have been a very formidable struggle with France. They pleaded, and that justly, that it was almost fatal to the well-being and security of the communities on the east coast of Australia that France should have its convict station in such close proximity. Men steeped in triple murders and every unnatural abomination made their way across from New Caledonia from time to time, to a colony planted with fair and virtuous homes. Of course we all sympathised with the colonists: we should resent the existence of a passable gulf between our homes and culprits of that sort. If by an income tax of sixpence in the pound we could make the strip of sea an impassable gulf, we should all be ready to do it. When a man has passed impenitent into eternity, his sin is just as much an abomination to the God of light and the children of light, as the crime of the French convict is to us. How is it that we sympathise with the colonist, but question God's right in fixing this impassable gulf? Has He no right to protect His children in their new home? Heaven would be no heaven if the proud Pharisee could come sweeping by, wounding some pure saint of God at every step, and seeking to press God's emancipated sufferers into new serfdoms. Sin created all the pains and the wounds and beggardoms of human life, and to suffer the gulf to be bridged would be to give back

Lazarus to his old shame and pain, and the rich man to his old pomp and selfishness. Lazarus had little enough of rest and love and comfort in life. He must be inviolably sheltered now. He shall not be even suffered to look upon the anguish of the lost. The rich man refused the fellowship of love below. He cannot undo his choice, and have that fellowship for his own selfish ends now life has gone. He must accept the full-grown distinction that he himself has created. The inequality between the two was but slight at first. It was channelled by years of selfish forgetfulness. And now the earthquake of God comes and rends it into a deep and bridgeless chasm.

And so it is with us. We fence ourselves off in our personal rights. By-and-by God comes, and sees the chasm between us and kindred souls of perhaps holier mould, and He says, "Here shall run the gulf that shall separate these souls for ever." Heaven and hell are hidden in the distinctions between good and evil. To bridge the two would be to obliterate God's everlasting sign that good and evil are not the same. The rich man accepts his destiny as hopeless. He correctly interprets the intimations of Abraham.

3. The parable intimates that the *permanence of the contrasted destinies* in the life beyond the grave is *certified by the permanence of human character*. The parable touches, in a very incidental way, the mystery of endless punishment. Its chief motive was not to teach a doctrine upon that question. But its collateral indications are perhaps as weighty in argument and impressive in power of appeal, as direct teaching. The permanence of the contrast in destiny is suggested, not only by the acquiescence of a sainted spirit in its justice, and by the inflexible decree of separation, but by the permanence of character illustrated in the subsequent appeals of the rich man. It is this chiefly which gives us to feel that final restoration to sanctity and to blessedness is a reckless dream of impossibilities. Some have tried to find hope for the rich man in Abraham's call to reflection, and have seen the first-fruits of a repentance unto life in the care he begins to show for the spiritual interests of his five brethren. But this overlooks the true nature of his appeal, the purpose of which is to challenge the justice of the ordinary dispensation God had appointed to prove men upon earth. Abraham's reply combats that particular inuendo. "Send to my brethren," is meant to imply: "Had one from the dead come to me, and lifted a warning hand against my folly, I had not now been here. I fulfilled every jot and tittle of what I knew. I was righteous to the full measure of God's dis-

pensation towards me ; and if I failed, I failed through a defect in the dispensation." There is the self-justifying Pharisee in his cry still. He can scarcely help trying to excuse himself after the old fashion of his earthly life. His arrogance exceeds all its ancient bounds. He puts his judgment above that of Abraham, and covertly impeaches the Divine righteousness. That hidden abomination before God, self-exalting and self-justifying pride, has now become an abomination that is open and revealed. It has reached its inevitable issue of blaspheming God to screen self. Vain flattery of human nature, to assert that the fires of Hades are purifying fires, and shall burn the evil out of human character ! Listen to the discourse of the lost rich man, and learn that those fires, instead of burning it out, only burn it in and deepen its stain. I wonder that men should have such faith in the reformatory effect of punishment. When we call to mind that forty-five per cent. of the convictions in our police courts are the convictions of people who have been sentenced before, and that ninety-five per cent. of sentences to penal servitude are passed upon people who have previously had an acquaintance with the pains and rigours of prison life, it does not seem very reasonable to hope much from the reformatory tendency of the punishment that will overtake the wicked beyond the grave. The habit set up in life still dominates the spirit of the rich man. He turns with miserable infatuation away from God, and turns only to himself. The permanent contrast in character is the witness and seal of a permanent contrast in destiny.

If Christ had meant to hold out the faintest hope of final restoration, He would have so turned and shaped the dialogue that it would have exhibited progress rather than retrogression in the temper of this lost spirit. At the outset He would probably have described him as struggling against a destiny of inevitable pain. But after that terrible certainty had settled itself into the rich man's thought, instead of this proud, sullen attempt at self-justification, we should have had words of unaffected self-reproach and abasement. "Father Abraham ! I am the unworthiest of all thy sons. Now know I indeed that Lazarus my brother was precious before God. I wantonly neglected God's chosen one in the days of my feasting. Thinkest thou that Lazarus will forgive my sin ?" And the patriarch would have replied : "Yea, son, or he had not been here in Paradise. Cursed be thee for thy neglect in the days of old ? His meek patience at thy gate was even then a daily pledge of forgiveness." And after that the rich man's thoughts would

have turned to God, who had been sinned against by the contempt shown to His lowly servant. "Thinkest thou that the God of my fathers can pass by this sin against His chosen one? Will He pardon my proud reception and selfish misuse of His favours?" And the answer would have come: "Yea, verily, if thou canst humble thyself. But know that long ages of purifying pain are before thee. Thou must endure patiently as Lazarus endured in life." And the word of submission would have come: "I will endure the pain if it will cleanse me from that which is worse than pain, the memory of the misspent past. I will bear the anger of the Lord, for I have sinned against Him. Let me hear thy voice across the gulf pledging to me His forgiveness at the last." "Son, it is pledged." "Great forefather, I ask no abatement of my pain. I pray not that I may follow Lazarus as his lowly attendant and minister. Angels encircle his path with their nobler service. I cannot undo the wrong of the past, but let him know I bear the torment of this flame as the sign of a willing repentance." And the holy patriarch would have replied: "Son, thou hast well said. Be it unto thee according to thy word."

That would have been a true picture of the rich man on his way to ultimate restoration. But Christ's picture in each separate detail is the very opposite of that. The rich man, who had been a Pharisee throughout his earthly life, is an irreclaimable Pharisee in the spirit-world. He still thinks of Lazarus as a mere slave, who can come into the flame to minister to his necessities; and to clear himself of voluntary defect and unrighteousness blurts out his reproaches against the spotless government of God.

4. This parable teaches that these final contrasts in the destinies of the future life rest upon a *common probation* in this. The contrasts arise under free conditions that bring life and eternal well-being within reach of each soul. A fragment of the written revelation contained within itself all the essentials of a just moral probation. For us Jesus has been added to Moses and the prophets. It is a part of the pharisaism of human nature to claim, as the rich man claimed, that the probation is very imperfect. It needs a supernatural supplement or appendix to make it all it ought to be. Every impenitent man in punishment asserts that. But God has His answer ready in every history. The probation of Lazarus was surely less adequate than that of the rich man at whose gate he lay. If probation needed to be supplemented, it was surely in the case of the poor beggar. There he languished, diseased, poverty-stricken, despised; his opportunities of religious

knowledge limited ; his surroundings unfriendly to tempers of virtue ; his home-training, if he ever had a home, probably of the most unpromising description. One would have said, such a man will have to be tried by a less strict standard than the enlightened Pharisee, who is surrounded by helps to religion and whose life is full of gracious opportunity. But, strange to say ! the man whose probation it was claimed was imperfect was not the one who belonged to "the neglected masses," but he who had been highly placed in social and religious life. Lazarus had crept into the synagogue possibly before disease had wrought such havoc, or if the disease was of life-long standing, had been carried thither, as for the crumbs of earthly bread by compassionate friends. He had heard just enough to teach him lowliness of heart and faith in the certainty of God's succour and compassion. In spite of all his drawbacks he had managed to spell out the way of life. Here was the very case which proved that no relaxation of the common law of probation was needed. If the relaxation of the law was not needed for Lazarus, far less could it be needed for the rich man. O ye who are so zealous in demanding an extended probation for the neglected masses, take heed, for the most abject may need it not ! Beware lest you are found demanding it for yourselves, and demanding it in vain. Without travelling beyond the horizon of your daily life, God has His answer ready : some one a hundred times less favourably circumstanced, but who has proved the probation enough. God has the poor humble, truth-seeking Canaanite from Tyre and Sidon to confront the enlightened rebel of Capernaum ; the penitent idolater from Nineveh to confront the impenitent unbeliever of Bethsaida or Jerusalem ; the simple, suffering Lazarus to confront the sanctimonious plutocrat, with ample knowledge and boundless opportunities of doing good. God will have His method of dealing with men who have had an imperfect probation. That method is no concern of yours. You cannot claim to enter that category.

It is said that Goethe, the great prophet of German culture, cried out when he came to die, "More light ! More light !" If we may accept the word of one of the most friendly of his biographers, he had lived in unholy love with quite a string of women, and then trampled them under foot one by one with the most polished brutality. One wonders why he should have desired more light than he had. He surely possessed far more light than he followed. That was very much like the Pharisee challenging his probation on this side Hades.

At the very least, you have sufficient light for your repentance. You have truth enough to know that you are shut up to the gracious help and compassion of God. You possess knowledge enough to guide you as you turn like Lazarus from self and turn towards God. Your freedom as a moral agent would cease the moment a messenger from the dead flashed upon your view. Your will would be paralysed, and you would be incapable of the sincere, spontaneous repentance and willing faith that God esteems. Hear the declaration of Abraham as he looks upon Lazarus in his bosom,—an immortal witness of the adequacy of the most meagre probation, and then turns to the rich man, and from the rich man to his five brethren, and from the five brethren to all those to whom the word of God shall come : “If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead.”

XVIII.

UNTEMPERED JUDGMENTS.

"At that time shall it be said to this people and to Jerusalem, A dry wind of the high places in the wilderness toward the daughter of My people, not to fan, nor to cleanse."—*Jer.* iv. 11.

IN these words the prophet intimates that God will one day send a judgment upon His people comparable only to the sirocco of the desert. The harvestman welcomes almost all the winds of the summer time but this. Their gentle currents lend themselves to the winnowing processes that are necessary to complete the toil of the year. They may bring more or less of discomfort in their train, but they serve at least to separate the wheat from the chaff and to purify the promiscuous heaps of the threshing-floor. But the sirocco comes with no element of helpfulness or beneficent service in its terrible wings. The chaff and the wheat would be blown away in one common oblivion if left in its pathway. It is the agent of unmixed ruin, overthrow, death. Nothing can withstand the fury of the cyclone. It is the symbol of judgment without mercy.

The successive invasions that were soon to close in upon the Holy Land were to be of this unmixed character. The hour was approaching when the monarchy was to be finally uprooted. The flower of one generation was to perish in the overthrow. Whole districts were to be depopulated and repopled by alien races. Complete tribes were to pass into a mysterious oblivion, from which there should be no return. To only a small remnant were the judgments purifying. For the many who were overwhelmed there was no restored citizenship or religious privilege. The wind that came from the desert came to crash and to scorch and to destroy. It was "not to fan, nor to cleanse."

Some men claim that all judgment must be ultimately purifying. It is cruel, vindictive, and incompatible with God's goodness if it

is otherwise in its issue. The infliction of penalty can only be justified by its reformative aims. If we agree to this unqualified principle, hell will resolve itself into a more or less protracted purgatory, from which escape will sooner or later be possible for every one. If God's judgments are unmixed with hope, God Himself must be a mere Saul, projected on a scale of portentous magnitude, breathing out threatenings and slaughters. This inspired utterance however assures us that there is such a thing in the Divine economy as punishment that is purely punitive and not disciplinary. His judgments sometimes find their fittest metaphor in the hot, fierce, overwhelming wind that, with neither kindness in its breath nor healing in its wings, sweeps down the valleys and roars over the hills "not to fan, nor to cleanse."

I. Let us inquire if this penal element has a place in the best human governments. Could society exist without recognising it? When a law that is unimpeachably righteous can only be enforced upon certain sections of the community by the use of pains and penalties, does the process commend itself to our moral approval? Does the human conscience in its purest and most dispassionate tempers ever accept as a right and a legitimate thing the judgment in which no merciful discipline blends itself? "There is a spirit in man, and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding." All equitable government rests on moral inspirations. The presence of this retributive element in all the political economies of the world gives it the authority of a revealed truth. If we are compelled to admit it into our governments, we must be prepared to recognise it in God's.

Let us illustrate the question before us by any offence that may touch us deeply. We perhaps need to take a case in which our family instincts and sympathies reinforce our sense of right and wrong, for on questions that do not touch us deeply we are lamentably deficient in strong moral feeling. As I was returning home one night some little time ago, I saw a crowd gathered in a quiet, respectable street, and heard wild howls of pain coming from the centre of the crowd. I ascertained by inquiry that two youths not more than sixteen years of age had been taken into a public house and treated by some of their grown up fellow workmen to bad whisky. They had been reduced to a state not only of helpless intoxication but absolute stupor. For four hours, in the short waking intervals that came to them, they had been trying to walk half a mile, and for two hours past had been lying like logs in the street in which the crowd was gathered. A doctor had been called

to the scene, who suspected that they might have been drugged, and who was using somewhat painful methods to arouse them from this alarming stupor. You are bound to feel as much for other people's children as your own. Ought the adult workmen who had made lads in their teens drunk after that shameful fashion to the imminent peril of their lives, and worse still of their future morals, to be punished only with the precise degree of rigour necessary to make sure that they would never repeat their infamous conduct? If your own children were in question, would you not feel that English law was far too mild to deal with such miscreants? And would you not long to give them over to the king of Dahomey's bodyguard, or to yield them up to Chinese mandarins, or to put them into a Russian convict ship to be sent to Saghalien? Indignation in presence of such an outrage is right. The man who does not feel it must be lost to shame. He must be coarse and brutal and at home with crime indeed, who can look upon a scene like that without feeling the rush of hot blood to his head.

The indignation we feel at an act of that sort is not consciously designed to impress and educate and discipline the offenders. As far as we are concerned, the offenders are anonymous, and we may never come into contact with them. Our indignation, which we should only be too glad to translate into practical form, is entirely punitive in its basis, and independent of any immediate wish to promote the moral improvement of these gross offenders. We want to stop future offences by these or any likeminded brutes. We would cheerfully subscribe towards the purchase of a loaded whip for their castigation. We should protest however against an education rate for their benefit, even if there were a little corporal punishment thrown into the curriculum. If the board schools could be opened at night to teach these men manners and morals, we perhaps should not be very willing to be taxed even for the coal and gas bills. In a case of that sort we cry out for a judgment the main factor of which shall be punishment, and the subordinate factor discipline and moral improvement.

Assume for a moment that our law dealt with such misdemeanours, and that these offenders were on their trial. In the case of one it is admitted that a reasonable amount of punishment may do good. The warning will be salutary. He has improved in the past with all the stripes that have been laid upon him for his misconduct. In the case of the other, witnesses are brought forward to show that his disposition is of such a type that no punishment is at all likely to prove beneficial to his morals. Every penalty that has

been laid upon him in the past has driven him into a deeper degradation. It is infallibly foreknown that the one will be reformed by severe punishment, and the other will be hardened into more resolute malignancy. If you carry out your theory of paternal chastisement, you must adjust the sentence not to the crime, but to the characteristic differences in the dispositions of the offenders. You must punish the reformable man, and let off the man whom competent observers declare to be unreformable. Does that satisfy your sense of right? Not for a moment. It is putting a premium upon the obduracy of evil, and making the law an instrument for the demoralization of society at large. If we make any distinction at all, it must be the other way about. Our sense of right demands punishment of equal severity in both cases. As a question of abstract equity, the penalty must be proportioned to the wrong done, and not primarily adjusted to variations of temperament in the offenders. In the cases of natures not irredeemably bad, we are of course glad if punishment does discipline and improve and save. The ultimate sentence may possibly be a compromise between the offender's claim to the treatment which will be likely to promote his return to a better life, and the claim of the community that punishment shall be made admonitory in the case of every outrage upon its corporate rights. The claim of the community which is penal comes first, and in the case of all habitual offenders overrides the other. In not a few cases we subject men to suffering that is purely penal. In the administration of law we show that we believe in judgment that is entirely punitive, the judgment that comes like the hot wind neither to fan nor to cleanse.

If we work out to its logical conclusion the theory that all punishment must be disciplinary only, we shall be bound to adopt methods of procedure in our law courts more grotesque than the most audacious caricature has ever imagined. We must have no short sentences if all penalty is to be educating. We have no right to discharge a man, however slight his transgression, till he has given sufficient assurance that his character has been entirely transformed. Judge and jury would no longer need to concern themselves with the particular category into which his crime came. The only question for them to ask would be how far does the root of evil go down in this man's character? and what amount of force will be necessary to pull it up? Some men, who are incapable of amendment through pain, can perhaps be stirred to better desires, or at least taken away from their criminal tendencies, by wholesome excitements. Experts would have to step into the witness-box. In some cases it

might be found that a garrotter would be more sensibly improved by wholesome excitements than by flogging. For an incurably cruel man not very sensitive to pain himself, the sentence might be high feeding for twelve calendar months, varied with amateur theatricals and dog-racing twice a week. It would never be necessary for a prisoner to prove an alibi. He would secure more perfect immunity against penalty by proving that this was his hundredth conviction. If all penalty is to be disciplinary for the individual offender, we have no right to sentence a man who has been in penal servitude two or three times before. The man who has acquired an incurable taste for blood like that of the tiger will be in a better position before the law than the hungry lad who has stolen a loaf of bread. You must never touch your ghoulis minotaur, for you can no more cure him than you can humanise a man-eating tiger by three months of vegetarianism. Such suggestions affront our sense of right.

We are quite prepared to recognise the sphere of disciplinary punishments, but that sphere is strictly limited. All the punishments of the home must have the character of fatherly chastisements. When the law punishes those of tender years, it must recognise the possibility of their after-improvement, and never forget to aim at that end. But we build no reformatories for hardened offenders. We are prepared to leave the way open for their reform to the very last ; but after a certain stage of depravity has been reached, we cannot, in justice to public rights, stop to make that a specific aim. There must be some proportion between the pains imposed on the offender, the suffering his crime has inflicted upon others, and the danger to the common interest from the presence of such a centre of crime in the nation. If we take up any other position than that, we encourage the repetition of crime, and punish the good in mercy to the bad. The attempt to make the vindication of the law admonitory to the transgressor is subordinate to the deeper question of punishment. The operation of a just human law is not infrequently a wind that blows neither "to fan nor to cleanse." Although the sphere of God's disciplinary judgments is much vaster than that of man's, that also is limited. A point is reached at last where the judgment scorches without purifying.

Carlyle inveighed from time to time against this unhealthy sentimentalism, which would sap the foundation of all human and Divine law alike. In the "Life of Bishop Wilberforce" reference is made to a party at which Monckton Milnes, Thomas Carlyle, and other distinguished men were present. The conversation turned upon the question of capital punishment. Mr. Monckton Milnes was argu-

ing against death-penalties, on the ground that we could not know how far the offender was responsible and consciously wrong. Carlyle broke out: "None of your heaven-and hell amalgamation companies for me! We do know what is wickedness. I know wicked men I would not live with: men whom under some conceivable circumstances I would kill or they should kill me. No, Milnes; there is no truth or greatness in that. It's just poor, miserable littleness. There was far more greatness in the way of your German forefathers, who, when they found one of those wicked men, dragged him to a peat bog, and thrust him in, and said, 'There! go in there. There is the place for all such as thee.'"

There is no appeal against the principle that Carlyle put in his grim, passionate way. Punishment is primarily adjusted to offence. The penal element in it is paramount even to the moral discipline and education of the man upon whom it alights. It takes as much cognisance of past transgression as of possible reform. All legislation is bound to find some place for the judgment whose pathway is one of unmitigated wrath, that comes like the simoon, "neither to fan nor to cleanse."

II. We can scarcely deny to God a right that we claim for ourselves. *If this penal element is admitted into human governments, upon what conceivable principle can it be excluded from the Divine?* Has it not a far higher right to be there?

Many causes combine to weaken the sense we have of our own authority to punish wrong-doing. It is a strictly delegated authority. We always feel ourselves bound to greater restraint and circumspection in the exercise of delegated than original rights. We are often loth to lay upon men the pains of a dishonoured law, because we cannot be sure how far the culprit has been trained to recognise his responsibilities and to understand the claim the law makes upon him. If we could guarantee the adequacy of his past instruction in right and wrong, there would be less of tremor and indecision in the sentence we pronounce. We often feel ourselves incompetent judges of all that has transpired. We cannot be sure that the balance we strike between offence and punishment may not need subsequent revision. We judge and punish in dim twilights. That tends to make us hesitating and indeterminate. And then the sense of our own authority to judge and to punish is weakened by the recollection we have of our own desert of punishment in many things. Unless the offence is very flagrant, we fear to incriminate ourselves by judging another. We are haunted and half unmanned by this incongruous idea that a sinner is punishing his fellow-

sinner. It is often with bated breath that we enforce the pains and penalties necessary to our social security. And yet, notwithstanding all these things, we are absolutely sure of our clear abstract right to punish even in cases where the punishment has no educating purpose to fulfil to the individual, whatever it may have to the community. How much stronger is God's right! His authority is original, and not delegated. He guarantees in every soul He judges the sufficiency of the past training and discipline. He dwells in the perfect light. His judgment can never be unnerved by the fear of error. In it there is no restraint, but that of His own inviolable righteousness. The confidence He has in His own fitness to judge and to punish can never be weakened by the memory of selfishness, wrong-doing, or a moment's unholiness. Is it not much more within the range of His rightful prerogative to visit with the punishment that shall exclude hope, to make, if needs be, the wind that blows neither "to fan nor to cleanse" the messenger of His judicial wrath?

Disciplinary are distinguished from penal judgments, not so much by any quality in the judgments themselves, as by *the temper of those who become the subjects of such judgments*. The question whether purely penal elements can enter into God's government is one that must be looked at from the standpoint of the transgressor rather than that of the Judge. Are there incorrigible elements in human nature? As a matter of fact, judgments very often fail to sober and to purify here. There are men who can never be taught wisdom by the longest succession of business reverses. There are men who, humanly speaking, can never be taught common morality, however heavy the penalties they are made to pay for its breach. There are worldly men whom no number of sicknesses and providential bereavements can discipline into religiousness. Children are snatched from their side. They themselves are prostrated again and again by sickness. Lover and friend are put far from them, and acquaintance into darkness. But after a few childish tears they become as profligate and God-contemning as before. It seems almost impossible to cure a typical Parisian of his selfish frivolity. Paris during the siege was not very different from Paris at holiday time. The roar of Prussian guns was at the gate, food supplies were fast running out, elements of anarchy were seething on every side. But no strain of thoughtfulness or moral sobriety had come into the gay fools of the gilded city. Theatres, wine-shops, singing gardens were open every night, and thronged by the same frivolous crowds as of old. And this question is not one on

which we can throw the stone at France. The visitations of cholera that produced such panic a few years ago exerted no restraining influence on minds set upon evil. Whilst churches and chapels were thronged by penitent worshippers, public houses and places of dissipation a stone's throw away were more crowded than at ordinary times. One of the saddest testimonies to the ineradicability by human methods of certain forms of evil is, that it should have become the custom at the present time to speak of almost every deeply rooted sin as "mania." Where there are unreformable elements in human character, disciplinary judgment necessarily passes into the purely punitive stage.

It is often argued that the keener judgments of the life to come will produce penitence in those who have continued stubborn under the milder judgments of the present life. There is not only no proof of that, but nothing even to suggest that it is probable. Of course we must never assume that those who are incurable under the disciplinary pains and disabilities to which they are subjected by their fellow-men will be incurable under the wiser and holier discipline of God. The gospel teaches the very opposite of that. It proclaims hope for those who are shut out from hope in the various schemes of earthly citizenship. But God's discipline, although it may reach a great deal farther than ours, will leave behind it an intractable residuum. We cannot predicate anything from the cumulative power of pain. The wind does not become purifying by mere increase of the force with which it blows. After reaching a certain pitch of violence it can neither "fan nor cleanse." The cumulative pains of ages would leave no place for the exercise of will. A penitence eduved after that fashion would have no more moral worth than the closing of the eye before a sudden flash of lightning, or the act of starting aside to escape some threatened blow. In cases of that sort the will can scarcely act. Such a penitent submission to God would be a mere automatic shrinking of the sensibilities. Devils and angels would join in common shouts of derision at a penitence with no will in it. God could never smile upon such a travesty of the moral life and affections. When a certain limit of pain is overpassed, weak men become hypocritical saints and strong men fearless blasphemers. In all the strange allegory of the Apocalypse that seems to be an outstanding truth. When one of the angel's vials is poured out upon the sun, and men are scorched with heat, they "blaspheme God." When the vial is poured out upon the seat of the beast, men gnaw their tongues with pain and "blaspheme

God." When the seventh angel pours out his vial, "men blaspheme God because of the plague of the hail." God's judgments pass from a disciplinary to a penal stage through the impenitence of those who are the subjects of them. The judgment that has been turned into a hopeless judgment by the obduracy of man must still bear its melancholy witness to the righteous supremacy of the Divine rule. God cannot confess Himself conquered by the will that has hardened itself against His keenest discipline.

The judgment that has passed out of the disciplinary into the penal stage for the individual is still *disciplinary in its significance for the race at large*. The wind that blows to crush and to scorch and to uproot in one zone of the earth, after it has passed into new latitudes, and been tempered by the seas over which it travels, may become a wind of winnowing beneficence. The penal visitation of one generation may become the saving chastisement of the generation that follows it. The untempered judgment that swept away the antediluvian sensualists was a purifying ordeal for Noah and his descendants. The overthrow of the Canaanitish nations was a moral redemption for the twelve tribes. Not a few of the Jews of Jeremiah's time perished in the decimating captivities about which he prophesied. But a remnant of their descendants were saved through the very doom of their forefathers. We must not get into the habit of supposing that God's purposes ever terminate in the individual. That mystery of unending punishment, which seems to frustrate the Divine purpose of mercy to the individual, may fulfil a purpose of gracious admonition to the race. The law of vicariousness pervades the moral universe just as widely as the law of gravitation overspreads the natural universe. Hell is as vicarious as the cross on which the shadow of hell once fell. Upon the cross the Guiltless willingly suffered for the guilty. In the realms of the lost, unwilling spirits suffer a righteous penalty, that the untold worlds of God's empire may be admonished and preserved from falling. Perhaps one of the motives of the cross was to bring men under this vicarious law for their punishment, should they refuse the infinite benefits offered to them by this law in the cross. The very fires of wrath are sacrificial, although those consumed by them may not be purified. The angels who pour out the vials come forth from the temple clothed in the vestments of the altar. There is a priesthood of vicarious judgment as well as of mercy. As great fires are kindled in times of plague to burn up the germs of infection floating in the air, so the atmosphere of God's universe may need to be kept pure by the flames

of a quenchless Gehenna. The path of future generations in the long succession of ages yet to be, may need the admonitory beacon-light of permanently punished sin. To end the penalty would be to turn God's wrath against sin into a dim tradition of the past. The judgment that is penal only for the soul upon which it lights, that can neither "fan nor cleanse," may be a beneficent discipline for the wide universe over which God's sceptre sweeps.

When sin was punished in Christ, the representative Head of the race, the punishment was purifying. When sin is punished in those who belong to Christ, no matter by how feeble a faith, the punishment is made purifying through the merit of Christ's death. "With His stripes we are healed." A day is hastening on apace when sin shall be punished out of Christ and by Christ Himself, and then the punishment shall be purely penal. Sanguine interpreters of the Bible have tried to find, in the outer darkness, the darkness of a passing midnight in which penitent Peters weep ; whilst the tears and wailing and gnashing of teeth have been painted as though they were the initial stages of a repentance that shall one day be found unto life. But Christ gives us not the faintest hint of angels rejoicing over that scene, and they would be there if there were any earnest of holy relenting in it. No note from lip or harp of celestial watcher flows forth to blend with that last tumult of agony. The locked door, which no man can open when it has once been shut by the Bridegroom, finally sunders between the music within and the sorrow without. The sacred grief of repentant earth and the gladness of accepting heaven no longer blend into each other. The walls of a hopeless separation have mysteriously sprung up, like some volcanic peak in a night. The gnashing of teeth betokens an anger in which no possibility of chastened submission is present. The blast that shakes the stars from their courses, like untimely figs from the fig tree, is the blast of "the wind that is not to fan, nor to cleanse."

There is tender and merciful restraint in our present suffering. A wise compassion is about us now, to take the harshness from every affliction. Infinite love tempers the fire, and is present to restrain its kindling when we pass through it. And yet it is no easy thing to suffer. Who amongst us can bear the suffering with which no beneficence blends itself? We have that to face, if merciful discipline *does* not purify us. If the evil is not winnowed out of us by the fan that is in the hand of the gentle Messiah, we must nerve ourselves to meet the blast of His untempered judgment. It is no easy thing to bear the wrath of a fellow-sinner,

though that wrath is often futile and unjust and misdirected, and you comfort yourself by the thought that you are misjudged, and that the misjudgment cannot go on for ever. How can you bear the holy and unerring wrath that will one day make all the forces about you its instruments, and all the thunders the echoes of its righteous anathemas?

“We have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence : shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?”

“O Lord, rebuke me not in Thine anger, neither chasten me in Thy hot displeasure.”

May the merciful promise concerning Solomon be fulfilled to us, “If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men : but My mercy shall depart not away from him, as I took it from Saul”!

XIX.

NATURE PERFECTED THROUGH MAN.

"The creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now."—*Rom.* viii. 21, 22.

SOME of the greatest difficulties that confront us in believing that the universe was made and is still ruled by a Being of infinite good-will, arise from the contemplation of nature and its riddles. To the thinker who can escape from the toils of a necessarian philosophy, and believe in the free will of man with all that the postulate involves, the difficulties attaching to the problem of human suffering are not formidable. Man is a moral agent. He makes his own sorrow and the sorrow of his kind. If we take away all the wretchedness in the world that springs from depraved hearts, and institutions that embody unrighteousness and oppression, and artificial conditions of society, it is a very small minimum indeed that is left behind. And then assuming the doctrine of human immortality, for the minimum of evil to be endured here, there are surpassing compensations in the life to come. But these principles are scarcely applicable to the lower creation ruled by man. Much of the surface of the earth, we are told, is cumbered with hopeless desert. That does not speak of beneficent design. And besides all that, the most fertile lands produce what is noxious more freely than they produce what is subservient to the good of man and beast. The ground is unmistakably cursed, for whose sake, we are tempted to say, may be an open question. And then animate nature is a Pandemonium of internecine war and hunger and pain. We always see it "red in tooth and claw." The mind that first conceived gladiatorial shows and bull fights might have devised the daily spectacle. It is a vast Colosseum, the floor of which swims with blood, whilst the air is rent with howls of rage

and pain. And the explanations that help us somewhat when we deal with the enigma of human suffering scarcely serve us here. There is no doctrine of moral freedom by the application of which we can shift the responsibility from the Creator Himself. We teach no dogma of animal immortality that will warrant us in placing the pleasures of the life to come as an offset to the pains of this life.

Does not the Bible anticipate this much-paraded difficulty of modern science? It gives a clue to it in the story of the creation of man. It foreshadows a conclusive answer in the few verses of the epistle now before us. Nature is linked with man. Its shortcomings and imperfections are explained by his. It falls and rises again with the fall and rise of man. God might conceivably have made every atom a complete universe in itself. But He did not. He built the atoms into asteroids and planets and suns. And when he made man, He not only made him to be a part of the corporate life of the race with responsibilities to his brother man, but He made him a part, and the ruling part, of the system of nature, with power over inferior realms that were placed at his feet, and responsibilities to sustain for the well being of the realms subject to his authority. Just as the English law, in asserting the freedom of the individual, gives to the parent the custody of his own child, however vicious that parent may happen to be, so God gives to man, in spite of the moral lapses that have overtaken him, power over the world to modify it for good or evil at his will. For the time being, not even the will of the supreme King Himself comes in to override that responsibility, and all nature rises or falls in the moral destinies of man. He occupies, in relation to the inferior creation, a position analogous to that sustained by the Divine Mediator to all mankind, and by the revelation of the glory of God's sons the whole creation will be lifted at last to higher beneficence and more perfect majesty. The late Mr. John Stuart Mill said that "the facts of the universe suggested to his mind, not so much the idea of a beneficent and all-wise Creator, as that of a demiurge dealing with an intractable material, over which he had not acquired complete mastery." The true demiurge is man. God has given him an all but unlimited stewardship over nature, and we should not go to her anarchic realms to find out what God is. We may discover that by studying the possibilities hidden in nature. We should go to existing nature rather to find out what man is. It is a composite photograph in which Divine and human lineaments are mixed. Man is the acting lord here, and nature is

to a very great extent what he has either made it or permitted it to be. The kingdom suffers through the bad rule and misconduct of an ill-regulated king. This metaphor of the birth-pangs, which carries us back to the words addressed to Eve at the fall, links the groaning universe with man. It suffers through his sin, and will be delivered in his redemption. A slave may be virtuous and kindly in character, but if his master be evil, he will have to be the instrument of many an unholy behest. However benign the qualities latent in nature, it will necessarily exhibit at times the sinister character of the lord it is compelled to obey.

The savage is accustomed to believe that every part of the creation is animate. The tree grows and bears fruit by reason of a spirit that is incarnate in it. The rock is the shrine of some unseen divinity, malign, or well disposed. The river has a personal soul. We are told sometimes that every error contains a truth. It would perhaps be more correct to say that in every error there may be found the analogy of a truth. If there be a glimmering of truth in fetichism, it is this, that the spirit of man reflects itself in nature. The Bible is so far conservative of the language of fetichism that it clothes nature with the sensibiles and expressions that belong primarily to man. Nature is not in any sense the incarnation of man's personal spirit and will, but it reflects much of his character and life. His identical soul does not pass into it, but the shadow of what he is always rests upon it. It seems to echo the groans of his more conscious pain. "The whole creation travaileth." With the most eager solicitude it anticipates what man will be. It is feeling towards deliverance from the bondage into which he has brought it. For weal and for woe it is chained to his destinies. We can only understand the scheme of nature aright when we think of its fortunes as one with those of the race.

If we do not get our full share of nature's gifts, we are apt to charge upon it, and its Divine Author, things that in no proper sense belong to them. The pinch-faced street Arab, who has to feed like a pagan idol upon the steam and spiritual essence of other people's dinners, will not think very gratefully of the kindness of nature, even if he should be taken for a day into the country, and see a corn crop bending with the weight of its un-reaped gold, or fruit orchard with branches propped to keep them from breaking beneath their luscious burdens, or the vinery of a duke, with orbs of clustering purple fit to press into the chalice of the gods. Nature may be very beneficent ; but the hungry dock porter, who has been sauntering about for days without a prospect

of work, will not think very much of the prolific bounty of the soil, although he may see wheat pouring out of the grain-pumps and feeding pyramids that would have astonished Joseph. Nature's hand may be lavish, and her heart large; but the famishing millions of Asia will not be very profoundly impressed by her kindness, although they may hear that in the Western States of America wheat is so abundant and so low in price, that the farmers have had to burn it for fuel. To these poor wretches, nature will be tormentor rather than friend, nearer akin to cruel demon than to pitying angel.

Some time ago a political speaker gave utterance to an aphorism that would form an admirable comment upon the text before us. "The laws of nature," said he, "preside over the creation of wealth, but the heart of man over its distribution, in sympathy, justice, brotherhood." That defines the whole question for us with masterly clearness. Nature, after all, is only truly beneficent to the subjects of her kingdom when she is helped by the intelligence, the justice, and the kindness of man. It is by man and through his instrumentality that nature rises to the beneficent ideal of her creation.

God distributes the bread He is ever multiplying by natural processes, after *the pattern of the symbolic miracle in Galilee*. He commits it into the hands of servants, who are to be the channels of His bounty. Suppose for a moment that the sordid elements hidden in some of the disciples had come to the surface in connexion with that miracle. Judas, with characteristic avarice, slips into his capacious bag, or stores away in some hill-side cave, the portion of food he should have distributed to a hungry woman and her babes. Thomas, mastered by his constitutional despair, and dreading the privations that may come to the disciples in the evil days that are at hand, keeps back from decrepit old men the bread he was sent to impart with unstinted hand. "A lavish generosity of this sort," he thinks, "will bring early bankruptcy, even with the presence of a wonder-working Master in our midst." In the hands of the disciples the miracle becomes indefinitely less beneficent than Christ made it. If we could listen to the speech of weary men and fainting women as they creep slowly to their homes in the silent eventide, we might possibly hear some serious reflections upon the character of the Wonder-worker. "He only multiplied bread for the few. There was a mysterious limit to either His goodness or His power. I did not get a crumb. A poor woman by my side was swooning with weakness, and the

disciple who came our way had nothing to give. If this be a miracle, it is a very poor miracle indeed." You know that such criticism would be very wide of the mark. And yet some criticisms of nature run upon precisely the same lines. Whatever failure there is, arises not from any lack of generosity in the Power that multiplies the bread, but from the selfish, partial, short-sighted distribution of the disciples. Nature provides, almost wantonly, for the needs of the multitude, and as far as she is concerned hunger need never be known. We shall never see what nature really is till those who distribute her products have the large heart of love that belongs to the true children of God. Man robs her of her rightful reputation to beneficence. He projects upon her kind and radiant visage the shadow of his own darkness and inhumanity. Beneath her brodered robe she hides the soul of an angel, but man has made her the mere instrument of his tyranny and greed. Nature waits for the coming of a higher life. She can only find that life through the regeneration of man.

Nature has *fertile fields ready for her sons* that the foot of man rarely treads. Every pauper in our unions might be a lord of wide acres without confiscating any one's property. The politician's ideal of "three acres and a cow" is beggarly in comparison with the munificent scheme that nature cherishes in her heart. And yet across the Irish Channel the tattered peasant is fighting like a wolf for a rickety kennel on the rock side, and the right of being alternately hunger-bitten and drenched to death on the bogs of his forefathers. Thousands of operatives and artisans prefer relief-work and starvation wages in the winter months, to the life of the health-giving prairie. In the swarming lands of the East, millions cling to the soil on which they were born, and risk death by famine every decade, rather than move to unoccupied lands that can be reached without crossing the sea. How is it that the beneficence of nature throughout these vast virgin territories is wasted? She does not seem to be able to rise in the scale of her beneficence above man himself. She shares his bondage. She cries out: "Emigrate your destitute. I am ready for them. I will receive them with open arms, and clothe and feed and shelter them." Nature's challenge is not accepted, and why? We insist upon dealing with chronic pauperism by doles and pittances and palliatives. We have not enough of the Son of God in us to deal with the evil by large and far-reaching methods. And the selfish capitalist cries out too: "We can have no emigration schemes. The labour market will be depleted. When prosperity returns we

shall not be able to get sufficient hands, and the working-man will become so proud and uncivil that it will be impossible to treat with him." And starving people themselves are reluctant to cut the tie that holds them to fatherland, and plunge into a world that is altogether strange. If the sympathising and faithful brother were to be found everywhere, would not fatherland itself be co-extensive with the globe? The man pressed to emigrate thinks he might be taken in by the land-jobbers, or fail to find in his new neighbours the spirit of helpfulness he can always find in his own kith and kin. He will stand at bay in presence of famine rather than run that risk. If men in all parts of the world were Christlike, he would have no more dread of crossing the sea to found a new home than of taking the farm next to his grandfather's. Nature has spread a heaped-up table for the needs of every child of man. But in the craft, the selfishness, and the various vices of man, a file of demon-terrors have been planted about the table, that effectually ward off the famished crowds. Nature cannot rise above the moral level of those to whom she is placed in subjection. In his fall and in his rise alike man carries with him the creation of which he is the head.

The political speaker to whom I just now referred said that "the laws of nature preside over the creation of wealth." In one sense they do. But "*the heart of man*" *itself often presides over the laws of nature*. Sceptics with a turn for physiography point to the fact that a great proportion of the earth's surface is occupied by desert, and they suppose that they have disproved the old idea that a benevolent design guided the creation of the planet. May not the very desert be nature's benign call to labour? Some of the most fruitful soils of earth were once bog and rock and sand, and have become what they now are by human labour alone. The time wasted in a generation by the idle and dissolute classes of our fellow-countrymen, would be sufficient to turn the Sahara into a fruitful field. There are very few deserts that could not be fertilized and made productive if the capital were forthcoming, and the difficulty now-a-days is never to find capital, but to find men with sufficient honesty and faithfulness to qualify them for its direction and control. For many a century yet to come, room can be made for every conceivable increase of population. The old prophecies about the blossoming deserts are more than parables. They are meant to teach the lesson that the life of regenerate man will connect itself with the regeneration of nature to richer beneficence and more perfect service. The Highland crofters perhaps see

further into the meaning of those prophecies than we do. The salvation of man carries with it the redemption of the soil from waste and desolation. There is no reason whatever why, except perhaps just at the poles, the whole earth should not become an unbroken garden of the Lord. Nature must be judged by all that man is capable of making it.

When we judge God by His work in nature, we must look at *the ideal capability hidden in it*, rather than at the commonplace and possibly disappointing attainment of to-day. "The heart of man," no less than "the laws of nature," presides over the creation of all kinds of wealth. A peculiar emphasis seems to rest upon the fact that God created the life beneath us, with "a seed in itself," as that fact is brought before us in the first chapter of Genesis. In close connection with that statement, we are told that God "put man into the garden, to dress it and keep it." These inspired traditions, that seem almost childish in their language, contain a profound philosophy. These allegories assert in baby forms of speech the important truth which will solve not a few of our difficulties, that God never meant nature to be looked at apart from its relation to man. The reference to "the seed" looks to the far-away future, and not to the uprising life-form of the passing hour only. The seed was much more than the first stunted stem and the pale, poverty-stricken petals, and the harsh, acrid effort at fruit. We must judge God's work in every part of the world around us, not so much by what it is, as by what it is capable of becoming. Do not look to the berry of the hedge-row, or the dwarf flower of the bleak hill-top, for the gauge of God's beneficent work. Look at what fruit and flower may become under the most kindly and skilful and winsome culture. Nature will rise in us. It is linked with the fortunes of the race. It partakes of man's humiliation and shame, and it will reflect no less the glory of his full emancipation into the family of God. The cultivated flowers and fruits of a country reflect the morality and civilization of its inhabitants. On barbarian soils you may sometimes find rare blooms and dainty fruits, but the margin between the primitive and the cultivated type is never so wide as in countries where the standards of character and civilization are higher. Judge God's work in man by all that man may be trained to, and judge God's work in nature by the potential excellence that sleeps in its mysterious depths. If some exquisite porcelain painting had been spoiled in the after-firing, you would not judge the artist by the blunder of a drunken furnace-man. Do not judge God's work by the blurred lines you

see in nature to-day. It has been put in subjection to man, and can only be all that for which God has fitted it with the redemption of man.

Almost all the *forces of nature wait to receive the moral impress they are to bear from the character of man.* If he is of the temper of Cain, or driven by the evil of others to the defence of life and home, he takes the iron furnished to him by the hills, and puts on it the broad-arrow mark of murder, welding it into death-dealing scimitar or assegai, mortar or mitrailleuse. In the hands of renovated man the metal shall lend itself to peaceful industry and navigation and travel. "Blood and iron" shall be a collocation of words for which men shall have to look in dusty glossaries. Unrenewed man takes the chemical forces with whose raw ingredients he is supplied by nature, and manipulates them into charges which shall blow up public buildings, and mine cities, and dismember innocent women and children, and send our fighting ships with their poor human crews flying mid-heaven in a chaos of carnage and flame. These forces in the hands of man renewed in the image of God's gentleness, and made a loving son of the loving Giver of impartial rain and sunshine, shall be used only to tunnel the separating mountains and make ship-canals, to bring near to each other the different fragments of the human family, and prepare smooth highways for the feet of the weak and the weary. With the renewal of human character these forces shall gather about themselves absolutely new associations. Nature sometimes seems malignant to us, not only because she flings in our face such luxuriant crops of thorns and thistles, but because she seems to take a perfect delight in hiding in our fields and forests plants that are indefinitely more dangerous than thorns and thistles. But the very poison plants borrow their terror either from our ignorance or from the character with which the secret murderer has clothed them; and with the renewal of the human race in knowledge and true humanity, the things called "poisons" now shall be known only as healing herbs. In this way the miracle of the first disciples shall become a common fact in daily life, and Christ's words shall have a second accomplishment, and men "shall drink deadly things, and they shall no longer hurt them." If nature sometimes seems cruel, it is because man has made her so. Nature can only be "very good," as at first, with man's full redemption.

Man's sovereignty over animate nature, with all that it involves, is not so obvious as his power over inanimate nature. And yet proof is not altogether wanting of the fact that the different

circles of life in sea and forest and air rise and fall in his rise and fall. We may set aside the old-fashioned form in which this view was once held. It is not Moses, but one of the poets, who is responsible for the idea that just as soon as Adam sinned snakes suddenly developed poison bags, and wolves suddenly discovered a diabolic taste for blood, and elephants began to trumpet with rage and gather into troops resistless as tornadoes, and tigers underwent a sudden conversion from childlike playfulness and affability to homicidal madness, and eagles became possessed with an unwonted desire to pounce upon little, fluttering birds. The geological record shows that flesh-eating monsters, with all their terrible instincts and implements, had an existence before man appeared upon the scene. And yet there is an inverted truth in the poet's grotesque conception of the Fall. It can be proved to a demonstration that the animal world has been inoculated with the virulence of man's worst passions. The temper of a dog or a horse is influenced by the temper of its master, and the dispositions of all domesticated animals may be modified by selective processes. You know perfectly well that if you are walking in the country lanes on Sunday morning during service-time and see a man coming along with square-set jaws, snub nose, and sinister cast of countenance, he will be followed at no very great distance by a dog likewise of square-set jaws, snub nose, and sinister cast of countenance. Travellers tell us of alligators that are treated as sacred, and that never attack man. The least sign of aggressiveness on man's part would make the whole species his enemies. Some of the most powerful denizens of the forest will never attack unless first attacked. They observe a most honourable truce. Is not the domestication of animals a problem to which Moses and David and Paul had better clues than the modern naturalist? Is this the fragment of a lost empire, or the first conquest of a new empire that shall one day be completely won and harmonized by man's kindness and skill? If he has tamed the wild ox, the wolf, and the tiger-cat, there is no reason why he should not reclaim other realms of brute life from unbridled rage and insatiable blood-thirstiness. The fact serves to show man's possible power over all the animate creation. There is a vague and imperfectly defined truth in the legend of Orpheus enthralling the beasts with the music of his lyre, as well as in the Buddhist dogma that animal life has hidden strains of affinity with our own, and that saintliness can charm the tiger into friendship. In the emancipation of man from evil, the animate creation shall receive a joint redemption

and mount to higher ministry and loftier estate. "They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain." John teaches that as well as Paul. The four living creatures placed round about the throne are the symbols of the powers of nature. The subhuman orders of creation shall be redeemed by the redemption of God's sons. They sympathise with the progress of the kingdom. They join in the songs of praise with the four and twenty elders who represent the redeemed from amongst men.

You are perhaps ready to say : "The problem is not solved in this way. It will be little compensation to the dumb creatures that have suffered, even if their far-off descendants should be brought at last into a kindlier world by the regeneration of man." I am not going to say a word that, in bringing light to bear upon this problem, would lend any extenuation to the cruelties sometimes practised upon God's dumb creatures. The time will come when our descendants will be almost as much ashamed of some of our wanton cruelties as we are ashamed of the Moloch worship and cannibalism of our savage ancestors. But are the sufferings of the brute creatures as great as we might be tempted to infer from the analogy of our own life? The evidence points to a more cheerful view of the case. Imagination adds nine-tenths of the terror with which human suffering is invested. Unimaginative races suffer comparatively little under appalling mutilations. Brute creatures possess imagination in a very inferior degree, if they possess it at all. That may be accounted as an anodyne to soothe their pain. But is there to be no compensation for what has been suffered, even in this modified degree? Some have held a resurrection of animals. There are perhaps only two objections to that view. Our interest in the animal world is so slight that it scarcely seems worth while. And in animal life we detect no forecast of immortality. The doctrine of a resurrection, without the immortality of the spirit for its foundation-stone, is absurd. Possibly in some of the lower spheres of life the doctrine of the transmigration of souls may be truer than we think. The new doctrine of some modern naturalists comes curiously near to that phase of Oriental thought. They hold, and with a fair show of reason, that whilst human consciousness centres itself in the individual, animal consciousness tends to centre itself in the species to which the individual belongs. If that be the case, the suffering individual may be compensated in the improved and perfected life of the species. We may leave the "how" to the unseen Hand that will not fail to redress the disturbed balance in the minutest life. The whole

creation falls in man, and is to rise again in his moral uplifting. That is the great lesson for us.

Let us carry away from our study of this subject the thought that in deeply-folded ideal and benign potentiality, nature, as it came from the hand of God, was perfect. If we find it glaringly imperfect now, it is because man has either put upon it the stamp of his own vices, or been a slothful steward of his trust. Man's power of modifying nature for weal or woe is a tremendous thing. Never charge back upon the Creator the blemishes in the outward scheme of things that have grown with man's misuse of his power. The nature ruled by degenerate man may become degenerate no less than man himself. God and His works are perfect. "Great and manifold are Thy works, and that my soul knoweth right well."

This metaphor of the birth-pangs is introduced in connexion with three circles of life in the Bible. In bringing man to a new life birth-pangs are suffered by the Son of God Himself. "He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied." And then the Church itself is bowed with the pangs inseparable from the dawn of this new life in the death and resurrection of its Lord. "A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world." And these pangs quiver likewise through all the spheres of subhuman life. "The whole creation groaneth and travaileth together in pain until now." The pain touches the very feet of God Himself in the person of His Son, and it impoverishes the frailest form of life upon the earth. Does not that give to us a new measure of man's sin? His restoration from sin shall not only fulfil the joy of the Son of God and of the angels who minister in His presence, but shall thrill every fibre of the creation that lies at our feet. Nature waits for the full manifestation of our sonship. "Let the field be joyful, and all that is therein: then shall all the trees of the wood rejoice before the Lord: for He cometh, for He cometh to judge the earth."

XX.

MAN PERFECTED THROUGH FELLOWSHIP.

"And these all, having obtained a good report through faith (having had witness borne to them, R.V.), received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect."—*Heb.* xi. 39, 40.

IT is a comparatively easy thing to take hold of the great general principle that underlies these words. It is not quite so easy to give a detailed interpretation to the separate phrases of the text. This much is clear, that the Jewish patriarchs had to await the incoming of the after generations of the Christian Church before they could receive the crowning blessedness of the Covenant promise. The most transcendent gifts of God's bounty are reached out to men only in their widest fellowships. All generations must be gathered into one before the glory of His mysterious counsels can be revealed. A child can see that the inspired writer teaches that in the words before us. But the words suggest other questions that it is not quite so easy to answer. What is the specific element in the promise for which the Jewish believers had to wait? What is the better thing provided for us in which they are to share? Is there a perfecting of the Church of disembodied spirits in the intermediate state that is correlated to the gradual perfecting of the Church on earth? Is the perfecting partial, or does it wait for its full accomplishment to a yet more distant future? Let us follow out the obvious principle of the text, the interdependence of the souls of all ages in their final blessedness, and a growing light may perhaps then come to rest upon the particular phrases.

I. The words teach that the fundamental gifts of the religious life can be received by the individual in isolation and obscurity.

II. The most transcendent gifts of the religious life can only be received in common with the completed Church of the elect.

I. *The fundamental gifts of the religious life can be received by the individual in his separation and obscurity.*

We may be ready to ask the question, Was it not hard that these early believers, who had so nobly satisfied God's demand upon their faith, should be shut out from their full and final blessedness for ages? Why could not Enoch and Abraham and Samuel and Elijah be fully glorified as soon as they left the earth? Why need any portion of their felicity be postponed till the last wayward wanderer should have been gathered into the Christian Church? For the present let it suffice to reply that they received, without a single exception, compensations that in the meantime more than filled up the measure of their desires. Each Old Testament saint was assured by some sign or other that he had become acceptable to God. The particular form of the witness might vary, according to the knowledge, training, receptivity of the individual. Abel by his altar, Enoch in his silent meditations, Abraham under the glittering firmament, Samuel in the dim tabernacle at Shiloh, David amongst the flocks, Solomon at Gibeon, Elijah on the highlands of Gilead, possessed this assurance. In some cases there was a supernatural sign, in some cases a holy dream or an inward whisper. But the essential substance of this gracious witness was present with every true believer of the Covenant promise under the old dispensation. "These all had witness borne to them through their faith." They could not have proved themselves brave and strong, and accomplished all the heroic works that make their ancient histories so sacred, without that witness.

Their *comparative ignorance and detachment* did not bar them from the possession of this precious rudimentary grace. These religious heroes, upon whom the seal of God's clear approval and acceptance was set, did not belong to great devotional and educating fellowships. They lived apart. In the brain of many a Bedouin sheik who canters across the desert-sand to-day, you might find a more elaborate theology than in some of these patriarchs. If we, with our modern wealth of learning and abstract divinity and scientific illustration, could have conversed with Abraham or Isaac or Jacob, we should probably have been repelled by the crudeness of their views. I question whether we should have given them a certificate of orthodoxy. Their expectation of the Deliverer had more in it that was akin to inspired instinct than reason. But they were entirely loyal to its leading, and God sealed their faith.

And then some to whom God vouchsafed the infallible sign of

His acceptance belonged to *the nonconforming kingdom of Israel*. A logical High Churchman would have called them schismatics. He would have declared that their boasted assurance was only presumption and fanaticism. He would have chalked up his impertinent inscription of "uncovenanted mercies" over the witness of the Most High. They were not in the outward succession. They scarcely touched hands with each other, not to say with the after-generations. The line of believers immortalized in this chapter is a very zigzag line. But in primeval forests, and Mesopotamian cities, and Syrian deserts, and Egyptian courts, and Jewish temples and battlefields, the grand compensation of this infallible witness was never withheld from the obedient believer in the covenant evangel. From Enoch to Abraham, right on through the ages of persecution and captivity in which Isaiah and Daniel lived, wherever there was the consistent exhibition of faith, there also was this comforting witness from above. No disability of age or circumstance or education could debar from this. "They all had witness borne to them through their faith."

In the absence of the fully accomplished promise, a witness of some sort was *vital to their sustained fidelity*. The God who had called them to His service could not well leave them destitute of it. In the earlier ages there was no church, no Bible, no official and separated priesthood, no confirmation of their faith by a great congregation of fellow-believers. They could not go on from stage to stage in their chequered lives, imperfectly assured of the goodwill and approbation of the God they were seeking to believe and obey. The witness was the sustaining element in their patient, dutiful, life-long service. God could never keep back a thing necessary to the integrity of the religious life and character. He could not prove Himself an Egyptian taskmaster, and command His servants to form characters fit to be built into the universal temple, without granting one of the first requisites for the strengthening and consolidation of character, the sense of His favour and acceptance. It was through this assurance that the first believers became capable of an ever-growing fidelity.

And then *God could not leave an unnecessary burden on the conscience of His people*. No organ or faculty of a man's nature can compare with conscience in its sensitiveness. To deny conscience the rightful assuagement of its pain would be a barbarity akin to torture. Whatever disabilities and tribulations might be laid upon the fathers of the Jewish Church, they were brought at least into the light of God's unshadowed favour. They lived in that

light, and the light was not quenched when they passed away. No man lacks the essential gladness for which he was made, who has God's witness that Heaven accepts him, and that God's righteous claim upon his trust and service has been satisfied. His privations are not penal. He is out of purgatory for ever, and death can never put him into it, unless it can blot out the immutable pledge of God's approval from his soul. He has what the New Testament calls the earnest of the inheritance ; and to a mind delivered from its evil scepticisms, and kept firm in its faithfulness, the inward satisfaction is unspeakable. Before Christ had yet come into the world, assurance was the privilege and the possession of every Covenant believer. " These all had witness borne to them through their faith."

II. *The crowning gifts of the Covenant are vouchsafed to men in their mutual fellowships.* " That they without us should not be made perfect." The world's gray fathers and the youngest child in the latest term of time must be glorified together. The firstborn cannot outrun or anticipate the last.

The *life of nature is social*, and its different parts are perfected together. God does not fashion isolated orbs to shine in solitary splendour. He kindles systems and galaxies and constellations. The geologist tells us that rudely organized plants and animals were contemporaneous with each other. In the tertiary epoch the animal and the vegetable kingdoms were perfected together. Portents and prodigies never arise in the realm of organic life. Each flower is the member of a series. The unseen Artist does not paint it to bloom alone. It belongs to a resplendent family. The snowdrop is the first silver link of an unbroken chain. God flushes the great green spaces with the saffron of the crocus, the purple of the hyacinth, the snow of the hawthorn, and the pink and crimson of the rose. It is no solitary note that ripples out from the coppice or the hedgerow. The Divine ear delights in the many-voiced choruses of the spring. In all parts of nature there is community of development, fellowship of life and ecstasy. The rapture of one type of life is timed to the ripeness of another. The skylark carol over the springing corn. The nightingale pours its liquid love plaint into the red heart of the rose. There is a co-perfecting of all the kingdoms of life. God seems to delight in the magnificence of aggregate effects. And is it not so also in the spiritual world? Not till the golden chime is heard that proclaims the approach of God's ripe summer will the life of all the separate ages receive its highest glory and development. We are only in solitary training

for the anthems that will usher in the coronation of our common humanity. True music will never be heard till the blended song of Moses and the Lamb awes the listening spheres. Those who have passed out of our view will only be fully perfected in the perfecting of the last.

The higher you ascend in the scale of life, the more pronounced is this principle of interdependence. There are organisms so low down in the scale, that if you cut them into bits each separate part will live. Some creatures will survive if their heads or tails are cut off, and by-and-by develop new organs. The more highly-organized the type of life, the more perfectly is it dependent upon the health and well-being of the separate members, and the more sensitive to their loss. The whole of humanity is, after all, one organism. It is very significantly described as "one body." The description is almost as true if looked at from the commercial or political as if viewed from the religious standpoint. Humanity is being slowly bound into an economic whole. We here can only prosper in the prosperity of other nations. In the latest discovered lands the havoc would be great as that of a famine, if all commerce were cut off from the seas. London, Paris, Berlin, Vienna, St. Petersburg, Calcutta, New York are all so dependent on each other, that war rumours in one capital unsettle all commerce in the rest. We sometimes feel the force of storms a hundred miles away, whilst clear sunshine is pouring down upon our heads. Some of the scientists have tried to connect the cycles of sun spots with the cycles of drought and famine. Magnetic changes in the sun may conceivably affect in unknown ways the currents of human history. Possibly the universe is one sensitive organism, the different parts of which are too vast for us to perceive their correlation. Whether that be so or not, mankind from its cradle to its coronation, and right on through the untold years of its coming dominion, is one, and the various members of it can only be perfected together. Enoch, with whom God walked in daily converse, Abraham, who was called the friend of God, can only receive their complete illumination and ennoblement and victory in common with us. They must learn the great lesson of humility and patience and fellowship, and wait for the least and the latest of God's elect servants.

With the setting up of the New Dispensation *some new effusion of light and knowledge and spiritual victory has come to the Old Testament saints* in the region of the unseen. We must not suppose that spirits in the intermediate state are incapable of consciousness,

movement, progress till the last great day shall dawn. The Bible nowhere suggests to us that a spirit's renewal and education can begin in the next world ; but it does more than hint to us that, being truly begun here, the process will be carried on in the interval before the great day of God. The basis of faith must be laid in life ; but faith can increase in ever-expanding progression after life has ceased. In respect to all these, of whom it is said they have received together with us the better things of the promise, the basis of faith was well laid in life. They through their faith had received, without exception, some sign of God's approval. And now, in ways unknown to us, they have entered into the fulness of the promise desired and waited for by kings and righteous men of old.

A solitary perfecting in Christ is no more permitted to us than it was permitted to them. That is clear as words can make it. Progress is not the monopoly of those who are in the flesh. The spirits of the primitive believers share our higher and better things. The light and blessing and triumph that are our inheritance in Christ flash through the regions of the dead. The changes that have come to men by Christ's manifestation and sacrifice here have a counterpart in the circle of the unseen departed. Through the manifestation of Him who was the one hope of the Covenant, the life and experience and history of the Old Testament Church has passed through some new and glorious development. The family in earth and heaven is one, and is influenced by the same events. Between the two halves of the circle there is absolute sympathy and interdependence. The clause in the next chapter, the "spirits of just men made perfect," standing as it does in close juxtaposition with the text, "that they without us should not be made perfect," clearly suggests that a higher grace of the Covenant has come to them in the realm of spirits than they had received whilst strangers and pilgrims upon earth. This blessedness is not unlimited and supreme. It does not yet comprehend every part of the nature. For that they must still await the rest of their fellow-servants. "The *spirits* of just men made perfect." They were made just in the flesh, perfected through that blood of sprinkling, to the presence of which they are come in common with us. Christ's mediatorial sacrifice was for patriarchs, prophets, and righteous men of old, and it has brought them abreast of us in privilege and insight and power.

One of the Saviour's own utterances suggests precisely the same view. "Abraham rejoiced to see My day : he saw it, and was glad."

The marginal reading suggests that it was in the intermediate state that he hoped to see Christ's day. The appearance of Moses and Elias on the Mount of Transfiguration, when they talked about Christ's decease at Jerusalem, gives historic force and illustration to the other references to the subject. The transfiguration seems to have placed Christ's personality upon the borderland of two worlds, and to have made Him accessible to both. On the two sides of the transfigured humanity there were groups of eager disciples, waiting their perfecting by its holy influence and teaching. Moses and Peter, Elias and John, together with the communities they represented, were perfected together by the lesson of blended glory and pain that was brought home to them on the mount. The Star of Bethlehem shone on the righteous dead. The light and love and rapture of Jesus went forth to two worlds. The transfiguration scene was a type of the co-perfecting of all the faithful souls of the two dispensations. He belonged just as much to the earliest as the latest, and to the latest as to the earliest. If Christ was seen of angels, much more certainly would He be manifested to those into whose flesh and blood He had entered, and brought the promise of incorruption. In what way were the believing dead spiritually perfected, and made to enter into the fulness of the promise through Christ's manifestation amongst men? They were perfected in knowledge, in conscience, and in character. By that blood of sprinkling to which they came in common with their fellow-believers in the flesh, they learned that the forgiveness of sin was no piece of unthinking indulgence on the part of the Judge of all the earth ; they came to recognise a higher significance in sanctity, and to feel their obligations of worship and service measured by a higher ideal of sacrificial love and unselfishness.

Besides the richer effusion of joy that came to the first generation of God's servants through the work of God's incarnate Son, *their joy is further perfected with the progressive perfecting of human history.* The first promise to Abraham looked forward to the blessedness of all nations through his seed. The promise is not fully brought to pass, nor is the large hope of the father of the faithful fulfilled till that has been accomplished. The highest victories of the Church in heaven are only consummated by the victories of the Church on earth. The disembodied spirits of the Jewish participate in the progress and achievement of the Christian Church, and the Church of the first Christian centuries shares the progress of the Church of to-day in all parts of the world. We

have the highest possible warrant for the fact that "there is joy in the presence of the angels over one sinner that repenteth." And if there is joy for only one, there is greater joy for the many. And if there is joy at a sinner's repentance, much more abundantly must there be joy at that sinner's subsequent growth in knowledge and unselfishness and power of sanctified service. If there is joy in the new birth of a soul, much more abundantly will there be joy in the sublime history that follows upon the birth. Some time ago a godly and eloquent minister said that he shrank from death, because he did not like to think of missing "the thrill of living." Who knows but that the dead feel a still more subtle thrill? The future holds the seed of no harvest in the glory and shouting of which we shall not participate. That is the meaning of such passages as, "We shall reign on the earth." It seems to me that we miss the true significance of such texts when we interpret them with millenarian literality. That does not necessarily mean that we shall be raised from the dead long before the final judgment shall dawn, and be perched up on some throne of state, friends and servants of the Incarnate King. But it does mean that in the future triumphs of the Church all our desires shall be satisfied. It does mean that the holy purposes we have cherished shall be just as certainly fulfilled as though we sat on thrones and wielded magic sceptres to bring them to pass. It does mean that all the gladness and victory of the millennial epoch shall be ours just as truly as though we were the crowned conquerors to whom all eyes were turning. The blessedness that shall rest upon the earth when the work of the Church has been nobly and completely done, and the greatness of Christ's power shown forth in all human lives, will not belong to the coming generations only. We shall miss nothing by dying. The sunshine will come to us in the far-off land. We shall not be cut off from the supreme triumph. Just as the air of the polar and the equatorial regions is ever changing places and bringing about fresh and tempered atmospheres essential to all life, so between the different epochs of the human race there are grand and consolatory equalizations always going on. The perfecting will be common. Abraham and David and Daniel waited for us, and we in our turn shall wait for others. The perfecting is common for the Church of all ages. Within certain limits we hold in our hands the blessedness of God's servants of olden times, and we work in trust for the dead. Others will one day work in trust for us. There will be no supreme perfecting till the saved whole is brought in.

The text suggests that there is a *larger fulfilment of the Covenant in the last great day, for which the spirits of the old and the new dispensation must alike wait.* Before the crowning touch can be put on our destinies we must needs tarry till the most distant heir of the promises and the latest born of all God's sons has come into the horizon. God treated the race as a unity in Adam, He treated it as a unity in Christ, and He will treat it yet again as a unity in the consummation of all things. The life that rises in the individual soul, and the dawn of which is sealed with the witness of God's approval, must end in a catholic and an everlasting fellowship. This lesson seems to be suggested in the apocalyptic vision of the souls that cry from beneath the altar unto God. "White robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellow-servants also, and their brethren should be fulfilled." They could not receive the highest recompense of their heroic fidelity apart. The noble army of martyrs can only be fully crowned when the last pale recruit to their numbers shall have come in. The coronation would be robbed of some of its splendour if it should take place before the set time. And so with all God's servants, of every age and rank.

It is said that sometimes swallows arrive on our eastern coasts before the winter has quite passed away, and the great tide of migration set in. These stray birds have been observed to gather together and fly south, probably to the coast of Spain, for a few days or weeks, till the spring temperature has come, and the carnival of vernal life has begun to quiver in the air. They have had to turn aside to balmy climes for a little space and await the coming of the rest. So with the saints and prophets and martyrs of the earlier ages. They have passed into the unseen before God's summer sun has begun to shine upon the universe. In some sphere of temporary rest and blessedness, in a more genial land than this, their spirits are refreshed, and they await the completed number of the elect. The rearguard and the vanguard, the sowers and the reapers, the fathers and the children, the quick and the dead, will be gathered into one common circle to share the matchless manifestations of the great day of God. The splendour to which the latest ages have come will flow back into the earliest. The last perfecting benediction will not alight upon us in our isolation, but as members of a countless assembly. In the preceding chapter we are reminded that we have not yet received the last promise of the covenant, although Christ's mediatorial minis-

try has placed us, in common with the Old Testament saints, upon an indefinitely higher plane of privilege. "For ye have need of patience, that having done the will of God ye may receive the promise." There is a tendency amongst some theologians to let go the doctrine of a general resurrection and a general judgment. "These future crises seem unnecessary. Why cannot God give to the spirit some new embodiment just as soon as it has escaped the corruptible flesh? Why cannot He fix its doom without waiting the gathering together of all ages? A general resurrection and a general judgment seem superfluous." I take it the reason is suggested in the words before us. All ages must be perfected together. It is only in our association that we can receive the glorious fulness of the promise. This new view of the theologians is individualism in religion. Religion starts in the separate soul, but reaches its ripeness in fellowship and social unity.

When the ten sons of Jacob went down into Egypt to buy corn, Joseph did not forthwith make himself known, or feast them at his own princely table, or give them inheritance in the land over which he ruled. There were gaps in the circle. If there had been a premature disclosure of himself and his munificent schemes, the incident would have been robbed of its supreme attractiveness. The passing needs of his brethren were abundantly met. They received without money or price supplies from which to maintain themselves and their little ones through the years of famine. But it was when Benjamin was with them that the lavish banquet was spread, and Joseph declared all that was hidden in his great soul, and lifted up his kindred to share in his own wealth and high estate. And so is it in the ways of God. The last wanderer must have come in, from the east and the west and the north and the south, to sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom; the youngest child of the new dispensation must have been brought by the last turn in the path of the wilderness pilgrimage, before all God's lovingkindness will be unveiled, and His high counsels concerning us pass into their full fruition. The circle must be made complete. The lowliest believer of the coming ages will not be shut out from the consummated bliss and triumph. All parts of humanity, all races, all generations, possibly all hidden worlds of the unknown universe, will be closely and significantly interdependent in their final blessedness.

The fact that God should have determined to perfect the men of all ages together shows *how much He thinks of those great principles of mutual association and fellowship which we sometimes*

esteem so little. He shows honour to those lowly disciples and followers of His Son whom we do not sufficiently honour. He will not crown them apart. Their services have been obscure, their prayers secret, but their recompense shall be in presence of all worlds and all generations. Be prompt to recognise God's law of community. He will put supreme honour upon that law by blessing and glorifying at His appearing all members of the saved humanity together. God will not honour those who set aside that law. Some of us perhaps wish to cultivate religion apart. We wish to keep just on the border of the elect congregation without identifying ourselves with it too closely. We do not care to mix with "the rank and file." Of course we desire to be members of Christ's body, but we do not like to be in the same atmosphere as the other members. We want to pursue an independent kind of existence. The objection some people have to meetings for religious experience does not rest altogether upon the dull and unintelligent methods into which such meetings sometimes settle down. It rests on the antipathies of taste and social distinction, strong prejudices against Christ's imperfect followers, that are always symptomatic of a wretchedly defective religious life. All healthy spiritual life is social. If it cannot be helped by fellowship with others, it will at least be able to help. The poor wait to be cheered and the ignorant to be instructed. In this way life will be indirectly braced and increased, even if it have reached that state of marvellous excellence at which it is incapable of receiving help by the experience of others. God will crown you with a perfectness in fellowship that you can never know apart. Your life will be enriched, mellowed, and indefinitely expanded by social sympathy. In helping our brethren we are helping ourselves. Their progress and perfecting is necessary to ours.

God seems to be teaching us in this way *the humility which can be best learned and exercised through fellowship.* It is a check to our pride to be reminded that we can only be crowned in common with the rest. We cannot be crowned alone. The honour would be too high for us to safely sustain. It might imperil the balance of our moral life. We can only triumph in common with unnumbered multitudes. We must be defended against exaltation by the view we shall have of the common honour resting upon those around us, and of their common worth. Christ not only wishes us to see His glory, but to see the glory in which He will make His disciples to participate likewise. In the perfected life and fellowship of the last great day the glory of our fellow-servants

will be as precious as our own, and like our Master we shall wear many crowns. We shall be exalted in the common exaltation of all the redeemed members of the one humanity of which Christ is the head. If God were to give to us the full and immediate perfecting of our destiny apart, as soon as we have finished our course, we should miss its brightest benediction. Indeed, that would be a contradiction of terms. We could not be fully glorified apart from the common glorification of all.

And then by perfecting His servants together God seems to remind us of *the graciousness and beauty of patience*. Disembodied saints of the olden time are waiting for us, and we shall have to wait for them. They had their blessed compensations here, and receive yet better compensations in the presence of their redeeming Lord ; but they still wait till the last convert from savagery has been won, the last backsliding disciple reclaimed, the last weak and inconsistent servant of God strengthened and sanctified. They are in the van of the pilgrimage, but they have learnt so much of the gentleness and patience of Christ, that they wait about the fountains of life for the fading of the world's last twilight and the coming up of the last straggler in the far-off rearguard. Do not let us think ourselves isolated pilgrims or travellers. We belong to the sacramental host. Let us watch against selfish hurry and impatience. We shall have to await the weakest for our final blessedness. Let us wait for them with more Christlike patience here, and help them along the pilgrim path.

And then God has ordained that the perfecting of our destinies shall be in common, because He wishes *to set forth His grace and power upon a scale of incomparable magnificence*. The individual life is too small for the display of His gigantic generosity and goodwill. The canvas on which God's hand is to work its consummate miracle must be stretched to its utmost dimensions. No square-inch can be spared. The last salvable child must be brought in, the last life capable of entering into the joy of heaven be schooled and disciplined and purified, before the full manifestation of the glory of God's sons can ensue. How splendid the perfecting for which the holy spirits of so many epochs wait ! How sublime the destiny into whose effulgence all elect souls shall be together gathered !

XXI.

JUDGMENT BY THE TWOFOLD RECORD.

“And the books were opened ; and another book was opened which is the Book of Life ; and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books according to their works.”—*Rev.* xx, 12.

AT the time he received and wrote his visions, the writer of the Apocalypse had steeped himself in the phraseology and similitudes of the prophet Daniel. This metaphor of the opened books which enters into the vision of judgment is to be found in the writings of the captive noble. The metaphor may have been suggested to Daniel by his acquaintance with the work and procedure of the official historiographers in Eastern courts.

The metaphor is intended to teach that God has his own secret processes for verifying those facts of life and conduct which will be crucial to his final judgment upon each member of the human race. What those precise processes may be it is not for us to say ; but the processes when once disclosed will bring irresistible conviction and bind upon the worlds assembled at God's bar the spell of submissive silence.

The brain of man has devised many an ingenious instrument for checking the errors to which he is incident and carrying the processes of memory and observation to a degree of absolute scientific accuracy and completeness. In the observatory you have the seismograph to register the oscillations of the ground in earthquake. Automatic pens have been devised to mark down the force of the winds, the vibrations of the atmosphere, and all the changes of the fickle temperature. In our gas and water works similar instruments are employed to give the height of the water in the reservoir and the amount of gas in the gasometers day and night, as well as meters in our houses. We all know how infallible these processes are, at least if the gas-bill looks

reasonable. With us the mechanical is truer than the mental process. The mechanical process fills up the defects and lapses in our observations, and bridges over the necessary breaks in our attention, and speaks plain truth where the human witness would sometimes perjure himself.

These words seem to remind us how delicate and deliberate and exact will be the adjustment of reward and punishment in the life to come. It is no rude, rough and ready division which is drawn by the judgment-day. I have been told that upon great national occasions the Chinese emperor is accustomed to pardon a certain number of criminals who have been sentenced to death, but the method of selection is strange to our ideas. A document inscribed with the names of all the sentenced criminals of the eighteen provinces is brought into the imperial presence, and the emperor is said to take a brush, close his eyes, and strike a circle haphazard on the sheet of paper. Those within the circle are allowed to live, and upon those outside the law is allowed to take its course. It is no such rough and ready and degrading methods God uses in his judgments. We talk of the twofold division, and we must never forget it and the momentous issues it implies. But within this twofold division there are variations and subdivisions for whose vast scales and ranges human speech has no adequate terms of description. Every atom in the life will be weighed. Every moment and the action in which it issued will be appraised. God is about to pronounce judgment, the like of which has never been known, a judgment upon his own children, a judgment that will fix for ages the conception of God and divine righteousness through untold worlds. The judgment must be minute and unerring beyond all other judgments. Every secret thought shall come into scrutiny. Every obscure act shall pass into the noonday blaze. There will be no grain of inequality to disturb the conception of infinite love and purity that will thenceforth be current in the universe. Everything shall be brought into the reckoning, and every man shall be judged according to his works.

It is not to meet any imperfection of his own nature that God institutes processes which record all the issues of human life and conduct. His eye never mis-sees. His attention never flags. His memory never becomes jaded or inactive or succumbs beneath the burdens put upon it. He establishes these recording processes that are as secure against the subtlest error as his own omniscience, that he may vindicate himself. "The judgment

drama shall be witnessed by those who have been hostile to God, and God will not ask then that his own truth and faithfulness shall be trusted. The judgment will have in it materials for the astonishment of all of us, and God will be clear when he judges. By methods now sealed up from us, God will give separate assurance of his own truth and faithfulness to the universe. But, although there are no lapses or imperfections in the divine intelligence that need to be checked and corrected by these recording processes, there are such things in our own thought and mental habit.

I. Saints and sinners alike are forgetful of their own acts, and more or less blind to the character which is the sum of those acts, although for very different reasons.

Genuine goodness is *at the very antipodes to all self-consciousness*. The holy man recognizes that the indwelling of God's presence is the inspiration of all active sanctity. His thought occupies itself with the fact of God's indwelling rather than with the specific facts of outward life to which that indwelling gives rise. His good works he looks upon as works that God has wrought through him, and for which he can claim no kind of credit. It is God who operates through him upon the world, and although in days to come God may rightly credit him with these right and holy acts, the man no more looks upon these acts as his own than he would think of himself as the creator of the sun. All his good comes through the communication of supernatural life and strength, and he would as soon conspire to rob God of his crown as think of the deeds that God will one day see fit to approve and recompense as the fruit of his own separate motive and life.

To trust God's help, and then take honour to one's self, is a species of intellectual fraud. A good man is unconscious of the factors he contributes to the sum of his own virtue, and would be in imminent peril of losing his sense of God's enabling help and indwelling if he were to grow conscious of them. A true saint has not only a very short memory for his own holy acts, he never thinks of them as his own acts at all. He would lose his very character for saintship if he were to set himself to record those things that God's recording angel is graciously recording on his behalf.

And we will go a step further. The good deeds of a truly virtuous and holy mind will be *so normal and spontaneous that they will pass unnoticed and unrecorded*. The heart will no more

dwell upon them than the man in perfect health will go about with his finger on his wrist ever counting the pulses, or a clinical thermometer under his arm, taking the temperature hour by hour. True goodness forgets its own achievements. It has not time to remember them. Like those welcomed to immortal honour by the Shepherd King, it will disclaim and disavow in all sincerity its own ministries. The left hand does not know what the right hand has done. You can not hear the Pharisee pray half a dozen syllables without feeling that he lacks the reality of goodness. His virtues are very extraordinary acts, or he would not count them so eagerly. He reminds one of a vain negress out for a holiday in her mistress's finery. She counts each ribbon and flounce and feather, and turns ostentatiously round to gauge the effect of the train. It is put on for an occasion, and the occasion is somewhat rare. The man is not truly good who is good by spurts he can count. When we are found making inventories and catalogues of our own good deeds, the symptom is suggestive and unwholesome. Little will be left the recording angel to do for our honour. Every breath should be a benediction. The books will be opened to recover and immortalize all that we in our humility and unselfishness have forgotten to record. If we make our own memory recording angel, few of our good deeds will get into the wonderful volumes to be opened when the judgment throne is set.

And then how prone is the bad man to forget his evil deeds! His habits not infrequently *blunt and narcotise memory*, together with all the other intellectual powers. It may be that through drink or lust or worldliness he keeps himself in partial insensibility. He rushes from business to pleasure, and from pleasure back to business, and occasions for reflection are rare, whilst at the same time he is destroying by spasms of animal excitement the capacity for reflection he once possessed. And the more evil there is in his life, the less likely he is to recall it. The pain inseparable from a candid review of the past almost compels him to exclude review work from the plan of his life. I have sometimes gazed upon a distant mountain range. The outline has been so delicate that it was scarcely distinguishable from the floating clouds. You would to all appearance perpetrate a libel upon the dreamy and tender outline if you were to represent it by a sharp line. But climb the mountain, and, hidden under the soft, cloud-like outline, you will find rugged peak and gloomy crag and knife-edge stones that will gash to bleeding the feet of the

pilgrim. I have sometimes looked upon distant woods. O, how silken the texture of the foliage! How softly the outstanding trees are pencilled against the twilight sky! Surely a breath would dissolve them. But get into the forest, and you will find many a thorny bramble that will scratch the skin off your hands, and many a cruel nettle that will make the blood tingle with pain, and many a tuft of sword-grass that will tear the flesh like an instrument of torture. And so with us when we can put a few months or years between ourselves and the life of the past. Its harshness of outline, its venomous and cruel wrongs, the acts that have embittered the lives of others, are softened and subdued by distance. The past has become so vague and dreamy and unreal that we can not realize that terrible misdoing hides itself under the soft exterior. Sin seems to lose its hideousness when our memory of it is dimmed. We exercise a forgiveness of specious indulgence towards ourselves by forgetting the unholy things of the past. It is characteristic of wickedness that it remembers no more than it can possibly help. Well, God has unerring instrumentalities at work to check our imperfect realization of the past.

And then the Book of Remembrance is necessary to check and counterpoise those *distorting freaks of the imagination* which are apt to arise whenever we seek to judge ourselves. Imagination has its rightful place in the religious life, for lacking it we are incapable of either hope or fear. But imagination is very apt to play us misleading tricks when it creeps furtively in and influences us in the endeavour to assess and sum up our act, habit, and character. We seem all but incapable of a self-judgment that is clear, impartial, unbiassed. In examining ourselves we too often look at what we meant to be rather than at what we have actually proved ourselves. The picture is a composite. If we were asked to stand outside ourselves and form a conception of our own worth, severe, sober, unflattering, we should bring into the conception many flattering forecasts of what we meant to be. If a man is of a buoyant, aspiring, ambitious disposition, he comes to think of himself as a cross between the angel and the man. If he is prone to fear, diffidence, despair, he thinks of himself as half-way between the devil and the man. It is at rare intervals, if ever, that we see all the countless parts of our conduct and temper in white, vertical light. Imagination always thrusts itself in and casts its glamour over the performance when we attempt the work of strict self-judgement. It comes as a flatterer, and

makes us think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think. It is the mist which distorts and exaggerates and produces elaborate mirage and illusion. But we can not be allowed to count to our own credit all our vague dreams and intents and aspirations. A tradesman would be just as much justified in counting into his assets all the money he was going to make. God will have his methods of dissipating the fictions of the imagination. He will judge us from the solid, historical, unflattering stand-point. Our destiny will be determined by palpable facts which can be written down in truth-telling black and white. The only way of getting at a man's character is to count up his acts. The man is the sum of all he has done in his waking hours, and can never be suffered to borrow from his dreams. The Book of Remembrance is the volume in which God preserves his daily transcripts of all the jots and tittles in the evolution of character.

II. This reference to the books that were opened seems to carry with it an important doctrinal signification.

Some critics and interpreters of the New Testament tell us that there was a radical feud between Peter and Paul, and that their teachings did not admit of being harmonized. Some have asserted that the writer of the Apocalypse was on the side of the conservative section of the early Church, and that he looked with positive dismay upon the doctrine of justification by faith as taught in the ministry and writings of St. Paul. A well-known clergyman goes so far as to affirm that when John refers to the Nicolaitanes in language of such severe condemnation, he has in view the teachings of St. Paul and his disciples. We do not usually take our doctrine from distinctively metaphorical books, but in this vision the seer evidently finds a perfect reconciliation of the apparent clash and divergence between the doctrines of salvation by faith and salvation by works. Judgment was to proceed upon a double basis, *faith and works*, and the two were to sustain each other. If the writer had been teaching salvation by works alone, it would not have been necessary to refer to the Book of Life in which the names of believers were recorded. To produce the vouchers for their works would have been quite sufficient. A column of good deeds would stand as the offset to a column of evil deeds. And on the other hand, if the writer had been teaching salvation by faith apart from works, it would not have been necessary to open the books recording the lifelong deeds of those who were to be judged. If salvation were by faith alone, it would have been quite sufficient to produce the

Lamb's Book of Life in which the names had been written from the beginning by his redeeming favour.

The Book of Remembrance is kept to *vindicate the grace and wisdom and forgiving favour* of the Lamb in inserting the names of his chosen ones in the Book of Life. The entries in the Book of Remembrance availed to show that the believer in the atoning Lamb did not receive the atoning and forgiving grace in vain. By the virtues and activities that sprang from faith, he proved that the favour shown by the Lamb was wise and well bestowed. The forgiving love inspired a gratitude that never failed, and that abounded in gracious daily fruit of inestimable excellence. The one book vouches for the other.

The central place given in the judgment to the Book of Life teaches that one of the stern conditions of salvation is that the *name shall be written there through the grace* and atoning favour of the Lamb. A man can not be saved by the things recorded in the Book of Remembrance alone. If the good deeds put down there could be quoted as an offset against evil deeds, salvation would be salvation by works alone, and there would be no need to produce the other book, which is the Book of Life. It is because our names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life that the holy and acceptable works we may come to do acquire their title to reward. They are treated as a part of Christ's sacrificial work, both for and in us. The achievements that win the loudest human applause will be insufficient for the Divine approval and recognition apart from the place the Redeemer gives us in the kingdom of his grace by inscribing our names on the roll of the elect. This unseen registration brings to us power, inspiration to good works, and the title to the recompense of those works. The man who is outlawed for his offenses may have founded a remunerative business, but the act which puts him outside the realm strips him of the fruit of his own patience and industry. It would little avail a man condemned to penal servitude for life that he had written a superb poem, painted a gem of a picture, or invented a new motor. In the uncongenial places of his exile, cut off from the society of his fellows and from all the luxuries of life, money counts for nothing at all. He must be pardoned before he can reap any benefit from his invention or enterprise. So with a soul under the ban of God's law. It can reap no benefit from its own good works. The preliminary condition of all recompense is that the name shall be written in the Lamb's Book of Life. It is through the grace of the Lamb that we re-

ceive our first status as subjects in his kingdom. The enrollment of the name means right and power to follow up unselfish activities upon which the Judge shall look with approving favour. Do not let us trust in our own virtue. No soul will be saved upon the single basis. The name must be in the Book of Life as well as linked with beneficent doing in the Book of Remembrance.

On the other hand, let us not overlook the solemn fact that *our destiny will be just as profoundly affected by the plain chronicle of the daily life* as by the fact that we were once pardoned through the grace of the Redeemer, and enrolled as subjects of his kingdom. The Book of Remembrance and the Book of Life will lie open side by side. In our daily spirit and in our daily act we must justify the place we have in the Book of Life. It was a bold thing in our Lord and Saviour to impart and impute his righteousness to us when we were evil, a bold thing to give such honourable enrollment to the names of mean, guilty rebels. The audacity of it might excite the astonishment, and possibly the animadversion, of not a few of God's innocent creatures. How far does the grace and wisdom of the Lamb justify itself to the assembled worlds? If there is no entrance in the Book of Remembrance for good, the other entry will be stultified and must be blotted out. Has there been proof, not once or twice, but in the whole tenour of our lives, that we have not received the grace in vain? The Book of Life tells of the grace we have received. The Book of Remembrance tells of the way in which we have used that grace. The enrollment of grace brought a new obligation with it. If the inscription of the name in the one book attests that incalculably much has been given to us as stewards, and the record of the other book proves that we have never risen above the standard of righteousness practiced by decent worldlings, then alas for us! Where evangelical grace and the practical life bear no proportionate relation to each other, the name will be blotted out. We sometimes pray "that God would write our names in the Book of Life." God will not do all the writing. Unless we write our names for all that is true and lovely and of good report in the other book, or rather give the angel subject matter about which to write, the judgment will bring panic to us. Let us beware of thinking the name is legible in the one record, whilst there are blanks of damning sloth and selfishness and ingratitude in the other. The judgment will proceed upon a double basis. The Son of man accepts no faith not illustrated by works.

Do we live with this open page ever before our thought?

Each day yields some factor that shall help to make or to mar our eternity. In what terms does the recording angel sum up the work at each sunset? Do we not blush that life at its best is a routine of service rather than a fresh and holy and solemn inspiration? Are we not making the present world of shadows as much an all-absorbing world of desire and occupation to us as the insect makes the leaf of the plant on which it lives its only realm? Are we moving on the plane of the spiritual? Are not our very good works specious and stale and dead because of the lack of fresh faith and love? Is not our faith sometimes like a body without a soul in it, dead, stagnant, unproductive? God will receive you into his favour from the far-off land, will beckon you into the household of grace in your very rags and privation, but you must be clad in the robe of inward and outward righteousness before you can pass into the palace and sit upon its thrones.

